A Quarterly of New Literature

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W. H. GASS:
The Love and Sorrow of Henry Pimber

SHERMAN PAUL: Portrait of Paul Rosenfeld

RALPH J. MILLS, JR.: Dylan Thomas

ALAN DUGAN: On Hurricane Jackson

FREDERIC WILL

JOHN LOGAN

CATHERINE KARAMAGIANIS

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CONTENTS

W. H. Gass: *The Love and Sorrow of Henry Pimber*----67

Alan Dugan: *Love Song: I and Thou*----96

On Hurricane Jackson----97

Poem----97

Catherine Karamagianis: *Conversation Piece*----98

Sherman Paul: *Portrait of Paul Rosenfeld*----99

Adrien Stoutenburg: *Ghost*----112

John Logan: *Lines against a Loved American Poet after Hearing an Irish One's Nickname*----112

Frederic Will: *Hanging Leaf: Nov. 1*----113

Ralph J. Mills, Jr.: *Dylan Thomas: The Endless Monologue*----114

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ACCENT
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W. H. GASS:

The Love and Sorrow of Henry Pimber

There were still a few people in Gilean when Brackett Omensetter came. It had been dry, for a change, all day. George Hatstat's rig was mired down on the South Road even though the South Road drained into the river, and Curtis Chamlay had turned his wagon back from the western hill that afternoon, being a stubborn man, three hours after he started slipping on its yellow sides. That meant the hill should be impassable since the other slope was generally worse. Consequently everyone was very much surprised to see Omensetter's wagon come sliding down and draw its tilting peak of furniture and tools and clothing into town behind a single wretched horse. They looked at the unprotected quilts, the boxes and the stilting poles, the muddy dog, the high-lashed swaying cradle with bewildered wonder, for all day, in the distance, choked gray clouds had dropped their water in the forests, and even as they watched the wagon coming, away above the western hill, sunshine shining from it, there was a clearly defined acre of rain.

Pausing only to ask directions, Omensetter drove rapidly to the blacksmith's shop, bawling out his name before the wagon had fully stopped and announcing his occupation in an enormous raw voice as he vaulted down, his heels sinking so deeply in the soft ground it held him a moment, lurching, while he rubbed his nose on his upper arm

and Matthew Watson emerged from the doorway blinking and shaking his apron. Omensetter rushed to the forge and bent over it eagerly, praising the beauty and the warmth of the fire. He teetered as he pummeled a leg that he said was tingling, his body flushed by the coals and his shadow dancing. Mat inquired his business. Omensetter groaned and yawned, stretching with an effort that made him tremble. Then with a quiet exclamation he moved by Mat and took a piece of leather from the bench; wound it around his fingers like a coil of hair; let it slowly straighten. He held it gently in his huge brown hands, rubbing it with his thumb as he talked. He spoke in a dreamy monotonous voice whose flow he broke from time to time by peering closely at the edges of the strip he held or by bringing it sharply down against his thigh, smiling at the sound of the crack. He was very good, he said. He would start tomorrow. There was no one in the town brought up on leather, and Mat had far too much to do. That was certainly right, he thought. Mat would see how he was needed. His thumb moved rhythmically. His words were happy and assured, and if Mat's doubts were any obstacle, they calmly flowed around them. I shall work out very well and you can easily afford me. Before Omensetter left, Mat gave him the name and address of his friend—a friend who had a house which might be rented since it was empty and dissolving and sat like a frog on the edge of the river.

Henry Pimber smiled at Omensetter's muddy clothes, at the girls leaning over the side of the wagon, laughing; at the running, barking dog, the placid, remote wife; though he was conscious mainly of his own wife, quiet in the kitchen now, endeavoring to hear. Sheets of water still glittered in the road; the sky muttered; yet the wagon stood uncovered, belongings piled into a tower; and Henry felt amazement move his shoulders. Three flies walked brazenly on the screen between them. Omensetter was cross-hatched by the wires. To Henry he seemed fat and he spoke with hands which were thick and deeply tanned. His belt was tight though he wore suspenders. His dark hair fell across his face and he'd tracked mud on the porch, but his voice was musical and sweet as water, his moist lips smiled around his words, his eyes glimmered from the surface of his speech. He said he was working for Watson, mending harness and helping out. Henry noticed several squares of screen clogged with paint. There was a tear in the fellow's sleeve, and his nails had yellowed. Clay eased to the porch from his boots. Henry's wife was in the parlor then, tiptoeing. She held her skirts. He said his name was Brackett Omensetter and he came from

out near Windham. He was honest, he said. Flies already, Pimber thought, and the swatter in the barn. But they were something to fix his eyes on and momentarily he was grateful to them. Then his vision slipped beyond the screen and he received the terrible wound of the man's smile. Weakness surprised him and he leaned heavily against the door. He had a horse, Omensetter said. He had a dog, a wagon, a pregnant wife and little girls. They needed a place to stay. Not large or fancy. A room for the girls. Land enough to vegetable a little and hay the horse. Henry listened for his wife and shook his head. The screen was no protection—futile diagrams of air. He shifted his weight and the clogged squares blotched Omensetter's cheek. There was mud to his thighs. It hung on the wagon's wheels and caked the belly of the dog. His teeth weren't really clean. Henry realized that heavy-jawed and solemn as Matthew Watson was, as slow and cautious, as full of dreams of geese as he was, continually making the sound of a shotgun in his head, Omensetter had nevertheless instantly overpowered him, set his fears at rest, met his doubts, and replaced his customary suspiciousness with an almost heedless trust; yet to have sent Omensetter to see him this way was strangely out of character too, for Watson knew perfectly that the ancient Perkins house which Pimber had so recently inherited was very near the river and a yearly casualty of flood. The paint was peeling and the porch would soon be split by weeds. Henry sighed and flicked the screen. He had overpowered even Matthew. Matthew—who listened only to the high honk of the geese and his own hammer, and whose sight had been nearly burned out by the forge. Surprised, Henry found it bitter to share with anyone this man's inexplicable effects.

He had a place, he finally said. It was down the South Road near the river, but he hadn't thought of renting it on such notice, at such a time of year. There were difficulties . . . Omensetter opened out his arms and Pimber, trembling, laughed. There, you see; we'll care for it and keep it well in life. Pimber clenched his fists upon the curious phrase. His wife was in the crook of the door, holding her skirts, breathing carefully. It's down the South Road, though, he said, and near to the river. We all love the water, Omensetter said. Lucy and I are good for houses and we will promptly pay.

Who knew what sort of boots? Five narrow boards between his feet. Three flies regaining the screen. The shadows of clouds on the panes of water. His wife gently rustling. And the stout man is talking, his hands undulating. A button on his shirt is broken. Under his arms

there are stains. His stubby fingers clutch the air as though to detain it. Lis-sen. Lis-sen. The dog runs under the wagon. We have wives of the same name, Henry finds himself saying.

"There, you see," Omensetter said, as if his words included explanation.

Pimber laughed again. "It's down the South Road, I'll get the key." As he moved away he heard her knuckles snap. Behind him she stood stiff and motionless as a stick, he knew. She wouldn't like the mud on her porch either. He said the days of the week. After the habit of his father. He said the months of the year. Then he went the back way for his horse and prepared to hear about his crimes at dinner. Five boards between his boots. Mud on every step. A half a button missing. How many down? His face was broken when he laughed. Sweetly merciful God, Henry wondered, sweetly merciful God, what has struck me?

Omensetter left the wagon out all night, and the next morning he took his horse down the South Road and pulled Hatstat's rig out of the mud where three horses had skidded, kicked, and floundered the day before. Then he went to work as he'd said he would, bringing Hatstat's rig to town while his wife, daughters, and the dog moved in the wagon things and cleaned the house. Henry rose at dawn. His wife was scathing. Wrapped in the bedclothes she confronted him like a ghost. He dawdled along the road to the Perkins house until he heard the children shouting. He tried to help and handled everything he could; he peeked in boxes on the sly and sat in chairs and backed apologetically from room to room ahead of brooms and mops and mop-thrown water, observing and remembering, until, obedient to some overwhelming impulse, astonished and bewildered by it though it filled him with the sweetest pleasure, he secretly thrust one of their tin spoons into his mouth. But this action frightened him, especially the delight he took in it, and he soon apologized once more for being in the way, and left.

Hatstat thanked Omensetter graciously and he and Olus Knox, who, with his horse, had helped Hatstat the day before and got mud rubbed through his clothes and lumped up in his crotch, said nice things to people afterward of Omensetter's luck and thought, at the same time, of flood.

Rain fell a week and the river rose, water moving against water, a thin sheet of earth and air between the meeting rise and fall. The rain beat steadily on the river. The South Road drained. Clay banks

slid quietly away, pools grew; runnels became streams, streams torrents. Planks laid across the street sank from sight. Everyone wore hip boots who had them. Everyone worried for the land and houses south.

You didn't tell him about the river, did you, she would suddenly say. Whenever Henry was at home now his wife quietly followed him and in a venomous low voice struck with the question. She waited for the middle of an action like filling his pipe or settling himself to read, often when he had no thought that she was near, while shaving or buttoning his pants. You didn't tell him about the water, did you? How are you going to feel when the river's up and you're down there in a boat, getting him out? Or don't you intend to? Is it dangerous there when the river floods? Mightn't you drown?

"I might, I might. Would it please you?"

"I'd have no husband then to shame me. . . . You didn't tell him about the river, did you?"

"He knows," he said; but his wife would offer him a sweet and gentle smile and sadly turn away. He would try to read or strop his blade—continue whatever it was she'd broken into—but she would suddenly be back again.

"Mightn't he?"

Before he could direct an answer she'd have passed into another room.

"He saw the waterline on the house, you mean? That's how he knows?"

"Lucy, I told him it was down the South Road."

She laughed. "He knows the South Road, does he? Isn't he from Windham? So you told him it was down the South Road. Did he see the line on the house or the moss on the trees?"

"Oh for god's sake stop."

"Those wretched things he had piled in his wagon will be afloat."

"No."

"He didn't seem to care, though, did he, if they got wet or not. Doesn't strike me as a good sign of a responsible tenant. You'd want to know that kind more than a minute, I should think, what with mud on his boots and clothes and a wagon full of trash wide open to the weather."

"Lucy, please."

"Them and that baby in her . . . the land so low."

"Shut up." When he rose from his chair or put down his pipe or slammed the strap against the wall, then she would go, but not before she'd asked how much he'd got for it.

The rain stopped but the river rose anyway. It crossed the South Road with a rush. It filled woods. It drowned ponds. It carried away fences. Receding from its mark, it left silt sticking to the sides of trees. It flung skeins of slime over bushes. It took more than it gave. Olus Knox reported that the water came within thirty yards of Omensetter's side yard fence, and it seemed to Henry that more rain had fallen than had in years, yet in the past the Perkins house had always borne the stain of flood high on its peeling sides. Things are running for Omensetter, he said to Curtis Chamlay with what he hoped was a knowing smile. Curtis said apparently, and that was that.

2

Henry Pimber became convinced that Brackett Omensetter was a foolish, careless man.

He bought some chickens from Olus Knox, among them one old hen whose age, Knox told Henry afterward, he thought his buyer hadn't noticed. The next morning the hen was gone and all the rest upset. The girls soon found her. They were diving, hiding under the lifting fog, bending low to see beneath it the supernatural world and one another's bare legs stalking giants. The hen was dead by the open well and the dog crouched growling at its lip. Henry drove by to collect the rent that evening because his wife insisted that he go in person—face to face is safer, she said—and Omensetter showed him the eyes of the fox reflect the moon. The girls swung in graceful turns around the hole, their dresses palely visible. His eyes are like emeralds, they said. They are green emeralds and yellow gold. They are borrowed from the fire at the center of the earth and they see like signals through the dark. Then Omensetter told them of foxes' eyes: how they burn the bark from trees, put spells on dogs, blind hens, and melt the coldest snow. To Henry, kneeling gingerly upon a rotten board, they were dim points of red, and his heart contracted at the sight of their malice.

"How do you plan to get him out?" he asked, rising in front of Omensetter's chest.

"You can see how badly the well wanted him. He'll have to stay where he's been put. That's the way it happened and maybe the well will tire and throw him out."

Henry tried to laugh. Of course it was a joke. The kneeling had somehow made him dizzy and a button was missing from Omensetter's coat. Our fox is in our well, our fox is in our well, our well was empty belly, now our fox is in our well, the girls sang, whirling more rapidly. "Say, be careful there," he said, "those boards are rotten and one is missing; that's how the fox fell in; don't you. That cover should have been repaired." It was his well really, and he fell silent when he remembered it. Then he tried a cautious, apologetic smile. It might be the fox that had been stealing Knox's chickens, he thought. It would be Omensetter's luck, certainly, to have the fox pick out the bitterest hen only to gag on her as he fled and bitterly throw himself down a hole. What a terrible thing it must have been—to have the earth open at the moment he took the hen in his mouth, tumbling him into such a muddy belly. Cramped, bruised, his nose pressed into the damp wall, his coat matted and his tail fouled, with darkness all the way to the arriving stars, he would bloody his paws and break his teeth against its sides and then wear out his body with repeated leaping. By morning . . . hunger, and the line of the sun sinking along the wall like draining water, the fetid smells . . . bitter exhaustion of spirit. No wonder he burned with malice. Those are giant's eyes you see down there, Omensetter was telling the girls. The well goes through to the giant lands. They squealed. Omensetter struck Henry heavily on the back.

"But what are you going to do?"

Omensetter swung happily about the well with the girls, their bodies casting a faint shadow on the yellowish grass. "Naa-thing," they sang, "naa-thing."

"But that's cruel, you can't do that, you'll have to get him out. He'll starve down there." And Henry thought: how can he bear that terrible pair of eyes?

"He'll have to stay where the hen has put him," Omensetter said. "Spring will float him to the top."

"It's cruel, and dangerous besides." Oh yes, just too, if that is justice. Beautifully appropriate. Some day the earth will swallow me for all I've swallowed. "I'll help you board it up. The girls—"

"They enjoy it. If I covered it they'd cry." The girls pulled gayly at their father's arms. He began to whirl like a ribboned pole. "How long . . . do you think . . . those eyes . . . will last?"

Henry held unsteadily to a sapling. "You have a gun. He must be shot. That would be merciful."

"The well wants him . . . hooh . . . it's getting dark . . . girls please . . . stop."

"I'll do it then," Henry said, and he imagined the shot leaping from the barrels of his gun to rush at the fox. What's more I'll board it up tomorrow, he decided.

Henry drove home recklessly, debating Omensetter's dancing image. His speech was eloquent. Cruel, furious words, oaths unforgivable, escaped him. At first he was startled by the sound of his own voice—it was a hushed and gentle evening—but then he partly rose and shouted at his horse. The image grinned, putting its face between its legs, somersaulting. Beast. Beast. No better than the fox yourself. A dancing bear. His oaths, his threats, his accusations echoed and re-echoed in his ears, each time more fiercely, more ashamed, until he could not bear to hear them. Lately in his dreams he had known the wonder of cool sweet weather, a luminous atmosphere, clouds and winds that were orderly, and the undemanding peace of antique landscapes, clear and open between trees, with their wondrously gay figures, of which one was he, resting in company by a stream. At first these visions had embarrassed him but they persisted, growing steadily more explicit, and he found his pleasure in them more and more; they were more real; and he felt strengthened, curiously, and soothed when he was in them, despite the turmoil of his older life which sometimes overtook him. Now he could cry against his ghost when it rose from the bed to accuse him: do not pursue me, I am not the man. The buggy careened. His speed had begun to frighten him—his shouts had caused his horse to run—and when the buggy again lurched perilously, he immediately pulled up, although he felt he had betrayed his anger to his cowardice. It was this soiling prudence that defeated him. Omensetter takes no pains with what is his, Henry began complaining. Thoughtlessly he risks us both. Wrong . . . wrong . . . even though he's lucky and he trusts his luck. . . . Of course he doesn't really know anything, the innocent brute, he's no better than the fox . . . inhuman. Nevertheless it was true—and Henry fell into a quieter reverie—he was a wide and happy man. He could whistle as the cardinal whistles in the deep snow, or whirr like the shy 'white rising from its cover, or be the lark achuckle at the sky. He knew the earth. He put his hands in water. He smelled the clean fir smell. He listened to the bees. And he laughed his deep, loud, wide and happy laugh whenever he could—which was often, long, and joyfully.

It would be lovely to kick leaves. Not so simple at his age. Yet he'd seen Omensetter wading eagerly in puddles like a boy. He could do as he pleased.

It would be lovely to tell lies so beautifully they had to be believed. The well went through to the giant lands. Why not? What was the matter with that? Was that more real or less than Mrs. Henry Pimber's firm prim mouth? or her festive unlatching hands? No one thought the well went through to the giant lands. Not even his girls. Like Omensetter, they did not need belief in their believing.

Wading in the water. Rolling hoops and hollering in the street. Pasting kites and running in the meadows at the end of a string. Yet he took no care of what was his. To trust to luck? And so be lucky? He told stories that had the smell of meadow in them. When he told a journey you could hear the wagoning, and there was something worshipful in the way he handled water. Going with him anywhere was love. O Henry, Henry, come along, come along with me. To trust to luck? And so be lucky? For what he did he did so simply that it seemed a miracle. It eased from him, his life did, like the smooth broad crayon line of the man who drew your cartoon at the fair. He had an ease impossible to imitate, for the moment you were aware, the instant you tried . . . who was the fool who said that life came naturally? Henry loved him. It was a word men didn't use of one another. He loved him so. That way he was expensive. God. He came high.

When he reached home his wife immediately asked him if he had the rent and how much was it, but he passed through the house in a daze, wild and frantic, and went off again with his gun without answering, so she had to yell after him—what fool thing are you up to now—but she would see, he thought, bitterly observing that she hadn't thought of him as off to murder or to hunt but only as a fool bent on his foolishness; and in the back of Omensetter's unlighted house, not bothering anyone, he shot the twin moons out with both barrels. The shot screamed on the well sides and one pellet flew out and struck him on the arm so hard through his jacket that it stuck, but he, with great effort, while the cool stars watched, paid no mind to his wound, hearing the fox thrash and go still. Furthermore I'll board it up tomorrow, he thought.

Driving home slowly, his joy draining away and leaving him fearful and cold, Henry remembered how, as a boy, he had waited at the top of the cellar stairs for his father to emerge, and how, when

his father's waist was level with his eyes, without a motive or any kind of feeling that he recognized, he had struck him a terrible blow in the stomach, driving the air from his father's lungs and forcing him to bend abruptly, dropping his startled face near. Henry's mouth had filled with saliva; the base of his tongue had tingled; he had taken breath. Yet thank God he had run, weeping instead. Saliva washed over his teeth as he fled. He remembered, too, the sound of apples falling slowly on the stairs. His legs had been the first of him to be appalled. They had fallen apart like sticks.

Killing the fox had given him the same fierce heedless kind of joy, and now he leaned back in the buggy, careless of the reins, weak, waiting his punishment. Indeed he did feel strange. He had sensed his past too vividly. His head rolled with the road. He knew, of course, it was Omensetter he had struck at. He took no care with their life, that man. Luck like his did not come naturally. It had to be deserved. Anger began very faintly to stir inside him again, and he was able to steady his head. But the night was black; the moon and stars were under clouds; the world around him had been erased. He sank wearily in his clothes and let his head wag loosely in the circle of his collar.

Omensetter said to his wife when it is spring we'll go to Gilean on the Ohio. That is a fine place for the boy you're making. The air is clear. Therefore, when the snow sank quietly away into the creeks; therefore, when the rivers had their bellies brown and urgent; when the wind went hungry about the bare-limbed trees and clouds were streamers; then Omensetter said the time is coming and we must be ready. They washed their wagon. They ironed their Sunday things. They braided the hair of their daughters. They did everything that didn't matter. It made them feel good. They brushed the dog. They piled the firewood left from winter neatly. They pinched each other a good deal on the behind. Everything that didn't matter and made them feel good, they did. It rained a week. Then Omensetter said it seems that we are ready, shall we go? They piled their belongings on the back of the wagon. They heaped them up, one on top of the other: flaming tufted comforts and tattercrossed quilts, plump bags of clothing and sacks of shoes and sewing and a linen tablecloth with stains that were always hidden by the plates; two ladderbacks, a stool and a Boston rocker, a bench of quite hard and eloquent oak, and a drop-leaf table whose top was carved into faces and initials by no one they ever knew; jars, a framed view of the

Connecticut River, rubber boots; and in boxes: wooden spoons and pans and stove lids and pot-handle holders and pots, tin silverware and nickel-plated medallions and a toothpick, somewhere, thinly tinted gold with a delicate chain, a mezzotint of St. Francis feeding squirrels, some tools for shaping leather, two pewter goblets and thirteen jelly glasses, seven books (three of which were about birds by the Reverend Stanley Cody); a collection in tobacco tins of toy rings and rice-bead necklaces, amber-colored stones and tiny china figurines and stamped-out metal dogs and cats and horses and two lead hussars in tall hats and bent guns whose red paint had all but worn away; ten and twenty penny nails, dolls made from sewn chains of stuffed cloth, small dishes and large crocks, a paper cockade, four flat spiders dead a long time and saved under a stone in the hearth; a saw, a hammer, square, a sledge, other things that were called dolls but were more like pressed grass or pine cones or strangely shaped sticks or queer rocks; any kind of shell whatever—turtle's, robin's, snail's; and not in boxes: a tight bucket and an unassembled plow, a spade, a shovel and an axe, a churn, a wooden tub and washboard, and a great white ironstone basin and a great white ironstone pitcher and a great white enamel pot with a chipped lid that was terribly cold in the morning; a shotgun and some harness and a spinning wheel, a compass in a leather case that always pointed to the west of south, and arrows for the unborn boy to shoot at falling leaves and sparrows in the fall. They piled them up, one on top of the other, until there was a tower in the wagon. On the top they lashed the cradle. The tower teetered when the wagon rolled. They said maybe everything will fall into the road but they didn't really think so, and they didn't trouble to cover anything. Of course the rain would stop, they said, and it did. Omensetter hitched the horse to the wagon. He hopped up with a great flourish and addressed the world with his arms. Everyone enjoyed that. Omensetter's wife swung up too. She rested her arm on his leg and she squeezed his knee. Omensetter's daughters whooped up the back. They snuggled under quilts. They made a house in the tower. Everyone said a prayer for the snowman dead a week. Then Omensetter chuckled, the dog barked, and they set out for Gilean on the Ohio where the air was clear and good for boys. They left behind them, where they'd kissed and talked, water dripping lightly from the eaves of their last and happy home.

Upon the beach Henry Pimber rested, passing five white carefully gathered stones from hand to hand. Omensetter's darkened house

stood in his head amid clipped grass. Cold dew struck him and the sound of water in the dust, soft and distant, like slow steps that reach through sleep, possessed him. The pebbles fell, one by one, to the sand. Henry struggled with the urge to turn his head. Instead he bent and picked the pebbles up. They were softest pearls—like sweetest teeth. And Lucy's lamp went through his house and climbed the stairs. He flung the stones. They circled out, taking the light. One sank in the water's edge; one clicked on a greater stone; one found the sand; another brushed by the marshy weeds. The last lay at his feet like a dead moth. He drove home slowly because of a clouding moon.

Henry liked to tell of everything he saw whenever he passed Omensetter's house, although he was carefully silent about the fox, and neither he nor anyone who listened thought how strange it was they took such interest in the smallest things their newest neighbor did, for Omensetter cast an interest like a shade. It was as though one could, by knowing when his beans went in or when he cut his firewood for washing, hoed, or simply walked a morning in the oak and maple woods like a tree among the trees himself, learn his secret, whatever his secret was, since it must somehow be the sum of these small things all grown together, for as Doctor Orcutt was so fond of pointing out, every measle was a sign of the disease, or as Mat Watson always said, every turn of wind or rift of cloud was a parcel of the acreage of weather.

Henry asked him how he knew it was a boy, for girls, he said, were also known to kick, and Edna Hoxie, thin enough, she said, to crawl inside and pull a fat one out, stopped by to offer her services for the time. But Omensetter said he knew. He said that birthing would be easy for a boy who'd learned to crawl already. You may be disappointed, Brackett, Olus Knox has three, Henry said. Each time his wife conceived he hoped like you, and he has three. He finds it hard without a boy, with three who'll trade his name away, and now she's past her time. It could be just the same with you. I hope not . . . but it could be just the same. You shouldn't count too much on what comes out of her this fall or figure from how hard the baby kicks or from how high it rides. Still Omensetter laughed. He said he knew. He'd read the signs.

At first the wound was merely sore and then the arm was stiff. Get Doctor Orcutt for the love of God, Henry said, and went to bed. There the stiffness spread into the neck. Lucy learned in Gilean that

Orcutt was with Decius Clark at the bottom of the county. When Watson and Omensetter arrived, Henry had ceased to speak and his face grew tight as they watched. A shotgun wound? Then slippery elm, I think, Mat said. Lucy wept, running from room to room with balls of cloth in her arms. The lips drew back from the teeth, the eyelids flattened. Opium, I think, Mat said. The body bent. The room should be dark, I think, Mat said. Lucy stumbled up and down the stairs and the jaws at last completely locked. She was drawn in by the wheeze and when Omensetter asked her suddenly: have you any beets? the rags rolled out of her arms. Henry, in his agony, was sure he saw his poor friend Matthew leading Lucy to another room. Through the wall he watched her try to kiss him when he helped her on the bed, and tear wildly at her clothes. Mat then tiptoed to the hall and shut himself in its largest closet. Around him linens, towels, and female things were shelved.

Omensetter made a poultice of mashed raw red beet and bound it to the wound with rags and to the palms of the hands. Henry felt his sight fail as his lips yawned and air strenuously pushed itself between his teeth. Mat observed them from the doorway, apparently calm; but there seemed to be a button broken on his shirt and a tear in his sleeve. Then his body melted. It's up to Henry and the lockjaw now, Omensetter said; it's just between them. I'll stay, Mat said, he needs some company. Omensetter's hands were stained with beet. He doesn't care, he said, his body also dwindling. You loosened her clothing, good, Henry heard Omensetter say as his footsteps faded on the stairs, now she's asleep. Mat held to Henry's hand while Henry whistled steadily like steam.

Orcutt came by evening, tore the poultice off the wound, gave opium and aconite, forced lobelia and capsicum into the mouth, stared at the bandaged palms but did not touch the wrappings, waited for vomiting. Watson said to Henry afterward that in his opinion the jaw had already begun to soften, and he was not surprised when the vomiting began. I'd have sworn it was hopeless, Doctor Orcutt said. The Reverend Jethro Furber came to pray and the jaw was loose by morning. Edna Hoxie, midwife, brazen, asked Omensetter for the recipe and bragged to everyone that she'd got it.

3

That Omensetter had a secret no one doubted now. Talk was open and continual. Everyone recalled the mud around the wagon

wheels, the high-lashed swaying cradle, the girls, the dog, the knitting wife. So often had their arrival been related, with such gusto and particularity, that those who had not witnessed it, like Henry, soon remembered it as real and would have sworn sincerely they were there. But Henry's own salvation was the central thing, and Henry was frequently vexed to the point of tears, weak as he still was, by all the strangers who roughly butted his world. Opinion blew like Chamlay's gilded cockerel, bright whichever way it faced, but quivering. Nothing escaped, no fact, no chance conjecture even, that did not wildly run the town until some theory hung it by the heels. And there it aged. Eyed from every angle, sniffed and poked with sticks, it was carefully considered and appreciated. At first consigned by most to God and so to the Reverend Jethro Furber, though by a smaller group to Science and hence to Doctor Orcutt, still by a queer and unimaginative few to the will and constitution of Henry himself (to his own intense embarrassment and shame), the cure was now almost universally awarded to the beet root poultice and the luck of Brackett Omensetter. But what did this amount to? This credited the cure to . . . what? Edna Hoxie had an increase of trade, though Maggie Scanlon, unwedded, large, scoffed at the question. Don't he always get what he wants, she said. He's happy, ain't he, the sonofabitch. I wish to god I was.

For Henry his illness was a joy and agony that still went on. Whole days it rained continually and water spilled out of dry containers. He would sit in the sun with a blanket on his knees and feel the rain come down on the stiff summer leaves and fly from the dusty spouts, and he would beg the man's pardon constantly, as weak and palsied in his chair, as loose from his will, as he'd been during the first days of his recovery, or during those moments when he'd hid uselessly from Omensetter behind his screen. Then he would wail, frightening his wife. Again and again he would find it necessary to lock his teeth, for he felt he mouthed a nest of serpents, interwoven as with love, hissing, moving sinuously against his cheeks, yet moving without uncoiling. Then they slid through his head and peered angrily out of his eyes. I had no preparation, he would say to himself. That was the trouble. Everything has changed. I had no preparation; I wasn't warned; I couldn't know. I always thought I'd live with usual men in a usual world. But he'd lived with himself all these years like a stranger—and with everybody else. At the thought he would wail again, bringing his wife: frightened, enraged, implacably fierce and strong.

But there were also times, alone, in fields, in vacant rooms, when Henry seemed at last to touch him. It was as if he were there in person inside him. He could walk to the door or sit in a chair; yet he lay between sleeping and waking. He wanted to open his eyes, but he was anxious lest he withdraw too soon. He listened and he heard things, he felt and he saw, sometimes as in a dream, sometimes as in waking life. His hair stood on end. He cried and felt happy. His heart swelled with pain and he seemed borne up in glory.

Henry remembered coming. Clouds were living in the river, Gilean was resting by it, the air so clear. There was every house out honest and every barn banked proper to the weather. The trees were beautiful and bare and the tracks of the wagons glistened. They cut the pattern of Gilean's ordinary ways. Like the gipsy who took your fortune from your hand, you could see what your life would be.

On the way they'd all been singing *Rose Aylmer,* a song he'd heard sung so strangely once he never forgot it. The words were high and fine beyond his understanding but he liked their sound. Then sometimes they counted kinds of birds. There were rings in the pools of water by the road and the air was clean as it is after rain. Henry thought how exciting it would be for the boy to live by the river, to catch fish and keep frogs, to grow up with good excitement.

But his wife would come and jar him loose. Age had beautifully lined her jaw. Her knuckles were huge. She rattled tins and silverware in drawers. She had a smile that she kept publicly to herself.

"All right, all right, what is it? what are you thinking?" she said.

"Nothing."

"Nothing! You should see your face. Of your mother, I imagine, rest her soul. Why do you spend so much time at the shop? And in this weather—it's so hot. What do you talk about down there?"

"Nothing. My mother, why my mother? You never liked my mother. Is that why I'm supposed to be thinking of her now?"

"Doctor Orcutt thinks you're strengthening. He told me so."

If he loved a shadow in a dream, Henry thought, ought that shadow to be kind and love him too? He laughed, turning his wife sharply around. Illusion, he cried grandly to himself, still smiling, be true to me! Falsehood, be faithful!

"Laugh if you like. Oh you like being sick. With me to wait, wait, wait on you like a slave. I know what you're like if no one else does. You're strong enough. But you like to have me waiting on you, fetching, fixing, fetching, like a dog. That's all right. Time's

near up for that, you hear? Orcutt says you're strengthening."

Still weak and pale, he would go to the shop to sort his feelings. He would sit so quietly within the shadows behind the forge that visitors scarcely noticed he was there. It was like the effect of his illness, for after a time of pain and darkness he thought his eyes had cleared and he had watched from his bed as if from out of the world. It had been as he imagined it was like to be invisible. Your eyes were open. People looked into them but they didn't think you saw. They were less than a mirror, no more than a painting of eyes. The sickness was nothing. Many times he had struggled to say that he could hear. Being stretched to pieces was nothing. Many times he'd tried to shout I can see, I can see you—hissing instead. Fighting for breath was nothing. Burning was nothing. Locked in a shrinking boot of flesh, hour after hour he remembered prayers.

The child of Decius Clark, said Doctor Orcutt through his beard, is very bad. A bee stung him six weeks come Tuesday on the neck. You never saw a bigger swelling. Used to be a potter. Quit. He's farming now or trying to. Not much account. I won't collect. Orcutt spat. Let's see that finger Matthew smashed, he said, and his tone conveyed a quality of concern that made Mat blush, while Henry, observing it, had his heart fail. It's all healed up by now or fallen off but let me see it anyway. You are a bastard, Truxton, Watson said. You took on so about the way Brackett was neglecting it, I thought I'd see. No charge. The nail grow back? Mat told me that he knocked it clean away—that a fact? Omensetter held his hand out silently. Orcutt grinned and showed his brown-stained teeth. Seems like you've done my work, Mat, that's quite a brave scar. Always happens, cut like that. Like what, Omensetter said. Well first you cut yourself on one of them dirty knives, right? then maybe you get some acid in it, correct? Swell up did it? Red? I'll bet Mat knocked the pus clean out. Lucky. Orcutt dropped the hand and the arm fell muscleless. You was holding, I expect. Not a very careful knife—a sledge. Next time you infect a finger, see me first. They stared at one another. You're mighty lucky, mister, all around, Orcutt said. Then he asked Hatstat how the fishing was. Rotten, Hatstat said. Always is, this time of year, the doctor said. Never is, said Hatstat, you know that. Is this time, though, the doctor said. They should be up, the weather's still cool enough. Ah George, they never is, you want them to. Ain't that right, Brackett, the doctor asked, but Omensetter didn't answer, vacant-eyed. Mat fumbled with his tools. Henry

felt an unreasonable oppression. It was fiercely hot by the forge. Well he's a friendly sort, Clark is, said Doctor Orcutt, spitting. Not much account. I won't collect. But friendly. His wife is taking on about the boy but Clark is calm, I will say that. He's calm. How's your infection, Henry, it all gone? Out a little early ain't you? It's been weeks, Henry mumbled, backing deeply in the shop. Home remedy has killed an awful lot, Henry. Could have lost that arm you know. Fix your horseshoe game permanent. Does Brackett play? We won't let him, George Hatstat said. Too bad, I'd like to see that. He wiped his mouth again and spat a running stain. Everyone was silent. The child of Decius Clark is very bad, said Doctor Orcutt once again, but Decius is a friendly sort, and calm.

A hen's first egg is always female. Orcutt burned his spit. Mares who've seen the stallion late have colts. Scientific fact. Luther Hawkins tested the blade of his knife with his thumb, then sighted along it and winked at its tip. Ain't it the month? he said; they take turns, don't they, every other one? Orcutt shook his head. All thought a while in silence. The iron was a pale rose. I read a Swiss professor, what was his name? . . . Thury. That's it, Thury; he says the same. Danielson, downstate, has tried it. Works with cows. Works fine. Fact. Orcutt showed his teeth and pulled his beard. I couldn't say about the ladies. Henry giggled against his will. It's out of my experience, Watson said, and George Hatstat laughed like a whistling train. Orcutt hitched about and peered at Henry through the dark. How's Lucy these days, Henry? Henry tried to answer but he found his mouth was dry. Watson put tongs on the iron. Orcutt rolled his chew. His lips gleamed. She ought to get out more. Wars, Watson said. He began hammering. Wars, he shouted, more boys . . . replace dead ones. Sparks flew in arcs and showers to the floor. Not even Mat dared speak. Doctor Orcutt wiped his mouth and stared at Henry through the rain of sparks. The bar, reluctant, bent. The doctor hitched back, tilting his chair. He gazed solemnly at the ceiling where a spider dropped itself by jerks from a beam. Omensetter threaded a needle. There was a lull in the hammering and Henry's ears sang. Each man looked morose and thoughtful. Finally Orcutt said—lucky to be alive by god—in a low but outraged voice. The hammering began again. The cool iron jumped. Luther Hawkins moved the blade of his knife with caution, rolling back a sliver like a piece of skin, and Hatstat followed him intently while Omensetter stabbed a piece of leather with his needle. Orcutt straightened and

spat heavily at the dropping spider. The spit bore it off. At this the doctor slapped his knee and stood. There're authorities I've read who say that males are made in special weather, and there're those who claim the rapture—here he chuckled—the rapture has to be before the stroke of twelve. He hefted his bag. You rest easy Henry, eh? No lifting. No climbing. No spading. That sort of thing. He ran a finger between his collar and his neck and sighed noisily. Or it's the length of the prick—how far it throws the seed. He combed his beard. Whewee. The doctor remained a moment. All that's manure, he said. Manure. Then he strode away. Henry watched the forge until it burned his eyes.

Later Curtis Chamlay looked in to ask if anyone intended fishing in the morning, and Luther Hawkins, admiring the point on his stick, carrying on the conversation in his head, chuckled. Dogs don't care, he said. It's a fact. Then George Hatstat said: know what Blenker said that Edna Hoxie told his wife? . . . if she douched with milk she'd have a girl but if she squirted soda up, she'd have a boy. Damn fat Dutchman, how does he get on? Hawkins jabbed with his stick and picked dirt from a crack. Blenker ain't Dutch, Hatstat said, just ask him. No one's got one long enough to get a working distance past that belly . . . hell. Bent like a pin, must be. Curly like a pig's. Hoxie told her boys swole the right teat more, Hatstat said, and girls make special aches in the left side. In the ass, said Hawkins, in the ass is where. He began to draw in the shavings with his stick, laughing. It's good red meat that does it, Chamlay said. Beef. It's got some chemical. I know for a fact—it's what you chew along. The bar began to glow. Hawkins pulled at his ear. I saw one in a bottle at a fair . . . pickled . . . wrinkled up and pale . . . like a pig. Mat hefted the hammer impatiently. It depends on what she eats, Chamlay insisted. Hatstat made a disrespectful noise. Oh yes George, honestly; if she eats meat and works on hard and steady, she makes herself a boy, but if she lolls about and stuffs on candy—then she has a girl. Naw, Hawkins said; you eat it regular and all you grow's a beard. Chamlay grinned. Now you've got boys George, hey? But Rosa Knox? Henry began to squirm. He blew his nose. He began to cough. When Rosa's pregnant all she eats is sugar buns, Chamlay said loudly; ask Splendid Turner if she don't. Luther Hawkins nodded. Fact, he said, a scientific fact. I wonder what that little Perkins weasel filled Maggie Scanlon's belly with. Ah, that bitch—she'll give birth to dogs. The white bar lay upon the anvil

and Mat's hammer thundered. Afterward, when the bar hushed in the rain water, they discussed fishing for a long time. Olus Knox had come and he was always eloquent about it. That is everyone but Omensetter did, who sewed silently, a look of intense and painful bewilderment on his face.

4

"I couldn't sleep. Did you notice how restless I was and wound in the sheets? The weather must be changing. I'm always restless then." She filled her cheeks with air.

Henry dipped his hand in the wind, ignoring his wife's voice. Now the leaves would be learning of the cold. He turned his hand, letting the wind pass between his fingers. Cool as hill water it seemed to flow from the pale clouds. This is how it feels, he thought, like a wet cheek drying. The wind runs through the cup of Omensetter's hands. Time goes coolly through the funnel of his fingers—click, click, click—like water over stones. When he lately felt the wind he seldom had another feeling; yet there were moments, as if in dream, when he could plunge his hand into the air and feel the stream at the lip of Being, and the hesitating water. There was a bather at the precipice with breasts as great as God's, nippled as the berry bush, bright as frost. Corn golden hair was gathered to His thighs. Not in my image. Nothing like me. But in the dream that disabled him, he was afloat on the brink, poised above the incredible gulf like a bird, while each minute frightened him by passing over. With his hand on his ears he could feel them falling. Below lay an empty plain where the bright stream dried. It became a road that thinned to a rail in the cold horizon. He heard the roar of a miracle coming, a long beak looking for snakes.

There was a soft plop as the air rushed out. "It's going to rain, you can see that."

Henry withdrew his hand. "The rent is due. I'll walk."

"Walk. Walk. He'll walk too. You'll pass."

"Yes," he said, fetching his coat.

"Is walking what the doctor ordered? Whoo. Our room was stuffy as a tomb last night. Didn't you feel it? I don't want him here heaven knows, that beast. He's like an animal. Breathes like an animal. Awf. Smells like an animal. I don't want him here."

"He won't come here. That's why I'm going."

"Oh no it's not. He'd come. You want to meet him away from me that's all. You should stay here. He's just a beast, a beast. With her big lately he's been long without her—unless he never minds her pain."

"Lucy, please."

"Now they've had that boy it'll be a decent while before he'll dare to come at her again, I should think. Imagine that fat creature sprawled on top of you. Fur on him there like a tom cat's fur, I'll bet."

"For christ's sake!"

"O pooh, don't be a prude." She plunged her spoon into a bowl. "I wonder how poor Matthew can afford him," she said in a subdued voice, as if to herself. "He can't make as much as his rent surely." The batter cracked and she smiled.

"I wish to god—"

"Salt. Wasn't it last time I left out the salt? You remember. They were flat. You complained all evening and it was wretchedly hot." Sometimes she made Henry think of steam—of something dangerously vaporous and white—but she stood at the counter now as stiff and metallic as the spoon whose edge she wore around and around in the bowl she pressed into her stomach. "Well he works hard and I'm sure he's worth what he's getting. You're down there most of the day since your sickness."

"Since he saved my life. How you hate him for it."

"Oh for sweet sakes, Hennie, you know you always denied it. You never said he saved your life before. That sort of magic? You only want to rile me." She suddenly turned to him with a weak sad face. "I've a lot to complain of myself, Hennie, not just about salt, Hennie—a lot to complain of. You know our life . . . and . . . oh you oughtn't to do me this way, Hennie." Her face grew hard again. "Well. Wasn't that what you said? It was Doctor Orcutt, I thought, you gave your gratefuls to. Hoosh. My arm tires easy. In this kitchen. You should have seen him in this kitchen—my personal place. Chopping beets. These counters aren't my height. Well they weren't made for me but for your mother of course. He stained the wood in them badly, you can see it—there—there—see—over there—and here—and there—there—ah the dirty beast." She released the spoon and put her palm on the counter. She patted the wood. "Your mother, now, could stir a day and never sigh more than her usual."

"Well he works. He's handy."

"Oh I'm sure Matthew never regrets him. He *is* handy." She set the bowl down with a jar. "What an easy fool to dance the tune for both of you."

"Mat pays him properly, and after all, he's grown."

"Hoo. He's huge. Takes care of his children on that, does he? And his wife too? She must be mighty saving. What is he owing you?"

"He pays, he pays."

"Lalee. Of course he pays. He's what, if I weren't such a well-raised lady, I would call a poor stupid bastard—a poor stupid bastard."

"Well Lucy, you *are* a lady."

She looked at him sharply. "More than you're a decent man," she said. Then she began to cry and turned from the counter to blow her nose.

Doctor Orcutt, thought Henry. I hate him. His teeth slide in his beard and his eyes cross.

"Come out of the door. Are you hearing me? Henry? When he was here he stared at me like an owl."

"You should comb your hair."

"It was indecent—how he stared. Stared. He's just an animal. Hairy as a bear. His head turns the whole way around."

"Well I'm going."

"Go then. You'll pass in the woods. Must you be walking there? You're catching cold again. I saw you shiver."

"No."

"Like an old dog going everywhere there is a patch of sun to sit and shiver in. No one ever comes to see us. People used to—Gladys, Rosa, Mat. No one now since you were sick. He always takes the wood path. Why?"

"It saves time."

"Time? Oh dear. Time. The animal. Smell him. There's no time for him, there's only himself. Like a cow whose bowels are moving. Heavens, time. What do you want from him? You'll never get it whatever it is. He cares for no one, don't you know that? Not even you, Henry. Oh look out! You're letting the wind in. Shut the door."

The path took Henry Pimber past the slag across the meadow creek where his only hornbeam hardened slowly in the southern shadow of the ridge and the trees of the separating wood began in rows as the lean road in his dream began, narrowing to nothing in

the blank horizon, for train rails narrow behind anybody's journey; and he named them as he passed them: elm, oak, hazel, larch and chestnut tree, as though he might have been the fallen Adam passing them and calling out their soft familiar names, as though familiar names might make some friends for him by being spoken to the unfamiliar and unfriendly world which he was told had been his paradise. In God's name when was that? When had that been? For he had hated every day he'd lived. Ash, birch, maple. Every day he thought would last forever, and the night forever, and the dawn drag eternally another long and empty day to light forever; yet they sped away, the day, the night clicked past as he walked by the creek by the hornbeam tree, the elders, sorrels, cedars and the fir; for as he named them, sounding their soft names in his lonely skull, the fire of fall was on them, and he named the days he'd lost. It was still sorrowful to die. Eternity, for them, had ended. And he would fall, when it came his time, like an unseen leaf, the bud that was the glory of his birth forgot before remembered. He named the aspen, beech, and willow, and he said aloud the locust when he saw it leafless like a battlefield. In God's name when was that? When had that been?

Omensetter was in his large coat today. Pieces appeared between the trees. Then tousled hair. Round hot face: determined, splotched, Pebbly teeth. His arm was lifted in a wave. This disappeared. His hand grew from a limb. At first Henry stood still; then he dared to run. He craned his neck, went to tiptoe, stepped up on a rock, and once he even wavered the length of a fallen tree. His eyes flew back and forth and up and down in an effort to put the figure together. Omensetter crossed a small glade, in full view, but to Henry's surprise his feet were lost behind some trivial bushes, then a branch leaped in front of Henry to cut the body at the waist, while finally, just before he vanished entirely into the woods again, his head was hidden by a tuft of leaves at the end of a thin, irrelevant twig. Henry had felt certain of that empty space . . . certain. His pulse grew noisy in his ears. We must take care, he thought, everything is against us.

"The elder's pods won't hang through winter I'm afraid," Omensetter said. "The moss is thick and the 'pillar's fur is deep."

"I thought I'd walk your way," Henry said, "for exercise."

Omensetter laughed. His teeth were bleached.

"Oh it wasn't for the rent, I knew you'd come with that. And how is the boy?"

"The boy is fine. We have him sleeping south to catch what sun there is."

"What have you named him, I haven't heard."

"Amos." Omensetter lingered on the word. "I've an uncle of that name who's rich." He chuckled.

"Lovely," Henry said. "Amos Omensetter. Yes. Lovely. And the girls?"

"The girls?"

"How are they?"

"Oh they are fine, and Lucy's fine. The dog is fine too. So am I."

"Good," said Henry. "Fine." The aspen's leaves, he saw, were yellow early. Omensetter held money in his hand. There was a spatter of red in the maples. There the money was and there the end was. It would settle in his hand and be goodby. Omensetter would present his back and wave. The white oaks, still green, would swallow him, the sound already gone he walked so softly in the forest. Henry bent and picked an acorn up. If there were any other way. He filled his hand with acorns; flipped them idly. Omensetter's fist hid the money and Henry was grateful for that, but he saw he had trimmed his nails, and Henry felt terribly wronged. He tried to search Omensetter's face for a deeper sign but they seemed to be standing in a cloud of gnats. Henry waved his hand in front of his eyes. "I'm glad to hear that Amos does so well," he finally said. It would never do to ask if he would live there free.

"I want to see how far the turning's gone. Let's climb the hill, it isn't far." Omensetter held aside a pin oak's arms and Henry followed him.

A leaf would now and then detach itself and sail into the valley. Henry tried to speak but Omensetter led. The wind flowed around him as around a rock, and Henry didn't feel his voice was strong enough to salmon such a current. He watched a broad leaf break away and dip while the woods sank below them like a receding wave. They stopped for a moment on the bare hillside and Omensetter pointed to the flare his wife's wash made behind the trees.

"Orcutt says she shouldn't do such work," Omensetter shouted, "so I've taken to hanging it out myself." He lifted his shoulders expressively. "I can't get the girls to."

Then Henry realized that he could see through that massive green and changing tide as if to bottom.

It was since his sickness. . . . Everything began with . . . since his sickness. Once to petrify and die had been his wish; simply to

petrify had been his fear; but he had been a stone with eyes and seen as a stone sees: the world as the world is really, without the least prejudice of heart or artifice of mind, and he had come into such truth as only a stone can stand. He yearned to be hard and cold again and have no feeling, for since his sickness he'd been preyed upon by dreams, sleeping and waking, and by sudden rushes of unnaturally sharp, inhuman vision in which all things were dazzling, glorious, and terrifying. He saw then, he thought, as Omensetter saw, except for painful beauty. If there were just a way to frighten off the pain. The path was steep. His head was nearly level with Omensetter's marching feet—his softly polished shoes. Henry suddenly felt cruel. The fellow knew. He knew. The wind blew strongly and streams of tears protected his eyes.

Perhaps it was the height, perhaps the wind, perhaps he was catching cold after all, but Henry felt his sensations tilting. What he saw began to blur and merge, then once more focus brightly. He was about to bring something up from deep in himself. The frost was finicky, Omensetter said. Something like a mud fish with red malicious eyes, Henry thought, knuckling his brow. Apply counter-irritation: a prescription for life by Doctor Truxton Orcutt of the rotting teeth and juice-stained beard, who looked like the side of a house with a rusting eave. Now where was Omensetter's bright and simple world? Long, narrow, flat and black, a mud fish. And he'd never nailed it up, despite his promises to himself, despite his fear and his desire. He had bowed to the fellow, gone to his knees as he had to his father. Escaping to his room he had stumbled and fallen on the stairs, choking on his full mouth, spilling saliva down his chin to mingle with his tears. The leaves were minnowing. It had to be simple for such a simple fellow. Well listen old man, pain is the best known remedy for pain—keeps you alert. Just push with your thumb, gouge with your nail, gnaw with your teeth, kick with your feet, grind with your fist, strike with your knee. Some went early, Omensetter said. Do you think they are playing at Adam and Eve? Three children and a dog? PARADISE BY RIVERSIDE. Perhaps by Springwater Picturesquely Overrun. Exorbitantly leased from Mr. Henry God, a lesser demon, with insufficient spunk to make a Christ. No, he seemed inhuman as a tree. The rest who visited were human. They made him sick inside his sickness. Mrs. Henry Pimber: untidy hair, dull eyes, fallen breasts and shoulders, grief at her guilt in his death, her every gesture like a pose within a tableau of desire;

Mrs. Valiant Hatstat, rings spotted on her fingers, a small white scar like an unwiped white of egg lying in the corner of her mouth; Mrs. Rosa Knox, sofa-fleshed and fountain-spoken, with an intermittent titter that shook her breasts; Mrs. Gladys Chamlay, the scratched rod, nose like a jungle bird's, teeth like a beast's; Miss Samantha Tott, so tall she had to stoop in the sun she thought; and all those others, with their husbands or their brothers, invisible, behind them, making sounds to celebrate the death of poor old Henry Pimber; while Mr. Matthew Watson, neither praying, speaking, singing, crying, or exclaiming, uncomfortable in a corner, surreptitiously scratched a rash through his trousers. It'll be a while yet before they turn in earnest, Omensetter said. Not Adam but inhuman. That was why he loved him. Not for a life, God knew. Not for the beet root poultice. In the spin of his sensations, Henry caught the words. Who understood—to be inhuman? For he had seen humanity himself in everything. The good, the evil. The base and the heroic. The sublime and nondescript. Once he would have seen each tree boned humanly and branched with feeling like the black bile tree, the locust, despondent even at the summit of the highest summer. How nice it had always been to find his friends and enemies embarked in tame slow trunks, in this or that bent tree, their aspirations safely in high branches and their fires podded into quiet seed. There he could pat their bodies with his hands and carve his name and make up animal emotions for them no fruit could contradict. It had been easier for him to love great trees than people. Trees were honest. Their death showed.

"Hurry along. Let's go on. Come on Henry, I want to see."

Henry moved his feet unsteadily. Silver white were the spatters of the receding trees.

They were still silver in the spring. They were still new green like the river. The sun came to them. The wind turned them. And a dark deep glossy green grew on by the head of summer. It was like the green he sometimes saw when the sun was right and the wind had died cover a stone that was lightly under water. There was hedge green and ivy, slick as slippery elm and cool as myrtle. There was slime green pale with yellow; some that was like moss or grass beneath a rock or the inside of a shuck of corn. There was every shade of green in the world. There was more than the rivers had, more than any meadow.

"Come along. Let's walk to the top."

The wind rushed over the brow of the hill, billowing Henry's coat and flattening Omensetter's hair. Behind them, in the valley, the leaves were quiet as if at the hilltop they had sponged the wind. Here the rush covered their ears. Omensetter shouted something. He ought to wait—that would be proper. Henry's toes curled in his shoes to catch the ground. He sidled awkwardly, his coat lashing his legs until his body seemed to sing like wire. All the warning clouds had fled.

"There's the notch."

Henry ledged after him. His coat ballooned. Somehow, in this mad place, he was losing everything. Omensetter vanished. The ground seemed to fall way. He hadn't known the sea had holes but how else did you drown? Then he saw Omensetter's bushy head and he dropped into the notch where the wind roared above them like Niagara Falls.

"This is one of my favorite places. There's always a wind here, if there's any."

Henry sat upon a rock and pulled his coat about him.

"You don't like it," Omensetter said.

"Oh no, it's fine."

They had to shout. Lovely view. Henry was terrified by the wind. His terrible daydream was coming true.

"I come often," Omensetter said. "A boat's out. I wonder whose?"

Henry shrugged and held himself. He thought of the wild beauty of the trees, his own affection for them, his romantic sentiments, his wretched illness with its lying clarity. He filled the nearby air with desperate steam. "Will you come here in the winter?"

Omensetter made an ugly face. "Oh no, too cold, I'd freeze. Don't you love the noise?"

But when the sun was in the west the trees would be long shadows on the snow. Chamlay's snake fence would lace his south fields. Every bush would be big. Every twig would be cast. Every post would show plain. The tracks of feet and wagons would be cut in the snow for anyone to see the pattern of their customary ways. An immense sadness filled him, although the sun in the notch was warming.

"Do you remember coming" he shouted, pointing to the western hill.

"Oh . . terrible . . . muddy . . . that slimy yellow stuff . . . rotten trip . . . fraid it would rain . . . never do it again."

". . . saving my life."

"What? . . . who's out?"

The wake was like a wisp of cloud.

"I said are you happy in Gilean," Henry yelled.

"Swell . . . Mat and all . . . say next year . . . some corn . . . pigs . . . may have to move I say may have to move though . . . damp . . . for the boy . . . too damp by the river you know . . . have to be careful Orcutt says . . . eh?"

His words were lost in the roar. The boat etched its cold line on the water. The river and the sky were the same cold blue. Abruptly Omensetter left the notch and started down.

Henry felt his world reverse and fought uselessly against it. Omensetter pointed to the shadow of a bird running on the hillside, and looking up Henry saw between them and the sun a broad-winged hawk like a leaf on the flooding air. The sailor of the wind is loose, he thought; my life is lost down this dead hill. I've gone sick, Brackett, in this low place, and there's no honest snow to cover the ground or cold to hold it firmly even, and the hill we came by is still a bitter yellow. He had raised his arms and now he let them fall. I'm dreadfully sick. A scientific fact. Quiet giggles cruelly shook him. And I've barely been alive. Now dead of low ground and dishonest weather. Would that look well on my stone? He stumbled. To fly off! Leap away! My stone . . . for sweet sakes, Hennie, you'll never have a stone. I shall be my own stone, my own tomb, my own dumb memorial—as in the past. Hen-nie. Hen-nie. No one could put himself on purpose in this clay. I ought to be exposed upon a mountain where the birds can pick my body. Whoever's lived so little and so low as I have ought to spend his death up high. His mouth filled. Ridiculous words. Foolish patient, dreamer, lover—foolish, foolish fellow—poor, poor, stupid bastard. But I would have come with my arms before me like a present of flowers. He tried to spit and the wind lifted the saliva when it had scarcely left his mouth and drifted it like milkweed against his coat. From the hill when we came it seemed . . . it seemed (he nearly laughed aloud) . . . a place to be at home. The clouds had rose along their sides. They were swimming in the river and rain fell beyond us in the forest. The river like a bright hair ribbon . . . Gilean . . . a dream. Lalee. Naa-thing. Lalee.

"I need to sit somewhere."

"No. We'll go on down."

Stranger. Lucky fellow. Victim. Thief. And in my life I never knew another. The river disappeared beneath the trees.

They walked by the creek by the hornbeam tree; Omensetter, his hand in his greatcoat pocket where the rent was, his back indifferent as a wall; by elm and oak and maple, in the bowl that turned by the riverside, toward Henry Pimber's house where Henry followed, by the aspen, by the suede green sassafras, the beech. The silver morning grass was golden and resilient now. The slate was clean, the sandstones rich as brown sugar, and the red clay, softer after sunshine, moist, kept their feet to the slate, the sugar rocks, and the rough, resilient grass.

"I'm sitting down. I must." The log was stripped of bark and bleached. It lay by the creek like a prehistoric bone.

"The hill is steep. I should have remembered you've been sort of sick. How are you feeling now? good? . . . fine, that's good." He took money from his pocket. "I'm sure you understand, all right. We'll move when we can find a place. I want to be careful of that boy. You never can tell what may happen, isn't that right? There. You've been kind."

Henry stared but found no special meaning in his face. The money emptied to his hand.

"I must see how Lucy's doing." He swayed rhythmically a moment like a bear.

"Lucy will be doing fine."

"Orcutt said she was strengthening, but anyhow she must be watched," Omensetter said, his arm in a wave, "so must the boy. He's the only one we've got. Goodby." Limbs divided up his back. "So long."

Well . . . impossible to speak in a wind. What was in it, after all? Weather. Leaves. Pollen, he was told, from infinite plants. Dust too, of course. And the grains that carry cooking, smoke and pine tree to the nose. Seeds naturally. Flies. Bird song and the growl of bees. Himself. Pimber, Pimber, pity his poor fool self. Yesterday it was the long night rain that fell, misplaced, through morning. Tomorrow? Tomorrow might be calm.

Well . . . impossible to speak in a wind. And just as well. Why speak to my ghost? my bunch of bedclothes, rags, and wife? It had become tiresome to breathe.

Just the same I thought the way you walked through town, Henry whispered, barely aloud, carrying your back as easy and as careless

as you would a towel, newly come from swimming always, barely dry you always seemed, you were a sign. Remember that first evening when you came? You were a stranger, bare to heaven really, and your soul dwelled in your tongue when you spoke to me, as if I were a friend and not a stranger, as if I were an ear of your own. You had mud beneath your arms. There was rose on the cloud sides, I remember, a rich, warm rose, and I watched the clouds sail till dark when I came home. It seemed to me that you were like those clouds, as natural and beautiful. You knew the secret—how to be. Henry cleared his throat. Now the thought of Omensetter's happiness and luck upset him like a shameful story. He was sorry, sorry for everything. He was sorry for the money and the well. He was sorry for Lucy. He was sorry for himself. Tears pooled in his eyes.

Just the same I thought you measured us by your inhuman measure like the trees, and we were busy ants in hills or well-hived bees whose love was to pursue the queen and bring on death. When you put my hands in bandages and beets I thought I understood. There was no shade between us ever but the shade I'd drawn. You were the same to human or inhuman eye. Henry slid from the log and hushed his whispering. He pushed at low shrubs until he couldn't see the sycamores. It was thick in the woods. He parted the branches with his arms. Brackett Omensetter before he left had hid behind his face and made his back a wall. The man had been a miracle. He had, Henry spoke out angrily. A miracle. Not to be believed. And now he took defense against the world like everybody else. No miracle, a man, with a man's mask and a man's wall. Henry chuckled, unfastening the belt of his coat. The pooled tears ran. If Brackett Omensetter had ever had the secret of how to live, he hadn't known it. Now the difference was . . . he knew. Everyone at last had managed to tell him, and now like everybody else he was wondering what it was. Like everybody else. Henry wiped his eyes. Don't look for Henry here, my dear, he's gone. It should be tall. The white oak maybe. It had wide lobed leaves. Yet it was not an easy climb for a man who had been sick so recently. The sun would reach him early there and remain the day, the wind blow pleasantly. It ought to seem like leaping to the sea. He went by cherry and by black gum trees calling their names aloud. He was the Adam who remembered them. Tears nevertheless began again. How sorry for it all he felt. How sorry for Omensetter. How sorry for Henry.

ALAN DUGAN:

Love Song: I and Thou

Nothing is plumb, level or square:
    the studs are bowed, the joists
are shaky by nature, no piece fits
    any other piece without a gap
or pinch, and bent nails
    dance all over the surfacing
like maggots. By Christ
    I am no carpenter. I built
the roof for myself, the walls
    for myself, the floors
for myself, and got
    hung up in it myself. I
danced with a purple thumb
    at this house-warming, drunk
with my prime whiskey: rage.
    Oh I spat rage's nails
into the frame-up of my work:
    it held. It settled plumb,
level, solid, square and true
    for that great moment. Then
it screamed and went on through,
    skewing as wrong the other way.
God damned it. This is hell,
    but I planned it, I sawed it,
I nailed it, and I
    will live in it until it kills me.
I can nail my left palm
    to the left hand cross-piece but
I can't do everything myself.
    I need a hand to nail the right,
a help, a love, a you, a wife.

Poem

The person who can do
accounts receivable as fast
as steel machines and out-
talk telephones, has wiped
her business lipstick off,
undone her girdle and belts
and stepped down sighing from
the black quoins of her heels
to be the quiet smiler with
changed eyes. After long-
haired women have unwired
their pencil-pierced buns, it's an
event with pennants when
the Great Falls of emotion say
that beauty is in residence,
grand in her hotel of flesh,
and Venus of the marriage manual,
haloed by a diaphragm,
steps from the shell *Mercenaria*
to her constitutional majesty
in the red world of love.

On Hurricane Jackson

Now, his nose's bridge is broken, one eye
will not focus and the other is a stray;
trainers whisper in his mouth while one ear
listens to itself, clenched like a fist;
generally shadow-boxing in a smoky room,
his mind hides like the aching boys
who lost a contest in the Pan-Hellenic games
and had to take the back roads home,
but someone else, his perfect youth,
laurelled in newsprint and dollar bills,
triumphs forever on the great white way
to the statistical Sparta of the champs.

CATHERINE KARAMAGIANIS:

Conversation Piece

Suppose that Marc Chagall
Met the artist-philosopher
Tomioka Tessai
Not in Japan (that marigold world
Of shuffled planes)
But on the high peaks
Of Tibet
And both buttered their toast
And tasted tea from an earthen cup.
Would they say that halfway
Between the poet and his love
Float bouquets of katydids?
Or that plums and narcissi
Ladder the stars to a dream street
Of three o'clock? Or, as the pines
Pulled in the corners of the autumn
Landscape, would they smile
And finger the phosphorescent yellows
Lingering on the grey weeds?
Or stop to applaud
The blue air
Turning the smoky leaves
Into loaves of thought?

SHERMAN PAUL:

Portrait of Paul Rosenfeld

The Class of 1912 at Yale wasn't unusual. Of its 298 graduating members, 57 expected to go into law, 54 into business, 20 into medicine, 10 into banking and brokerage. There was a conquering confidence: "Symington will enter Wall Street." According to a poll, the most valuable courses had been "Social Conditions" and "Elementary Economics," with "Tennyson and Browning" not far behind. Kipling was the favorite prose writer, Tennyson the favorite poet and "Crossing the Bar" the favorite poem; *Ivanhoe* was the favorite novel. A majority of the class favored William H. Taft as the presidential candidate in the coming election.

One of its members who was still undecided about his vocation and whose tastes, one suspects, were not entirely represented by the class polls was Paul Leopold Rosenfeld. He does not appear in the lists of "most to be admired," "best athlete," "best natured," "most brilliant," "most original," "most optimistic"—not even "best dressed," for Yale had succeeded in getting others into Brooks Brothers suits. At the bottom of the list of "most scholarly," his name appears, his scholarly bent having been recognized by seven of his classmates if not by those who award Phi Beta Kappa honors. The face in the photograph in the *History of the Class of 1912* is a bit Prussianly severe; perhaps the moustache and high collar account for it. But there is no familiar nickname in the personal history printed beneath; and we learn that he had always roomed alone and that he had been an editor of "The Lit.," the least popular college publication according to the polls, its six votes undoubtedly cast by the six members of its board.

Military school had prepared him for Yale, but it had not prepared him to be a conqueror in what he later called—taking the phrase from Henry Adams—a "coal-power civilization." His father, Julius Rosenfeld, had been a small manufacturer; his mother, Sara Liebmann (Clara in the class history), was an accomplished pianist. Until her death in 1900, when Paul was ten, the family lived the well-to-do brownstone existence of upper West Side Manhattan that also characterized the cultivated middle class German-Jewish families that

produced Alfred Stieglitz and Waldo Frank. The father had literary, the mother musical taste; and the manner of their life, to judge from Rosenfeld's story, "The Dark Brown Room," and his novel, *Boy in the Son,* would have put him at ease in the drawing rooms of bourgeois Vienna or Berlin. They summered on the New Jersey coast, typical of those families that later disturbed Henry James and that led John Jay Chapman to cry out: "Judea— Israel— the Lost Tribes— lost no more! found— very much found, increased— multiplied— as the sands of the sea—upon the sands of the sea—in the city of the sea—Atlantic City. . . ." The mother's death destroyed the family. The children were cared for by their maternal grandmother. The father, whom the son spoke of in the class history as "retired" but who died before Paul entered Yale (according to his friend Jerome Mellquist), disintegrated under his sorrow.

Riverview Military Academy at Poughkeepsie, where Rosenfeld was sent in 1903 presumably to improve his posture but actually because "choicer institutions," as he admitted, would not accept him, did not make a soldier of him. His memories of the place are empty of military occasions. "On its parade-ground," he relates, "I discovered the advantage of piano lessons. Correctly to execute the maneuvers when the command was 'Squads right!' or 'Squads left!' I found I had merely to imagine myself at the keyboard. Promptly I knew which of my hands was left, which right. It made me a trifle slow, but never fatally so. Finally I attained a sergeant's rank." He always remembered the low highlands and the Hudson, for he later took Sunday excursions there; and he remembered a Mr. Charles H. Hickok who ran a music store and who, pretty much at his own expense as it turned out, twice brought the Boston Symphony to Poughkeepsie. At the Academy he took piano lessons, first from a "lady teaching by the noiseless method," the "pathetic, bosomy" Miss Virginia Gorse who began the first lesson with, "I'm glad to see you have rounded finger-nails. People with flat finger-nails, you know, are always deceitful"; later from a pale young man named Arthur Moore Williamson. If Mr. Hickok remained in his memory as an exemplar of the selfless devotion that makes culture possible, Arthur Williamson figured there as an exemplar of the talent that cultural wastes like Poughkeepsie (all the world's Poughkeepsie, he said) failed to nourish. No humor is intended when Rosenfeld describes this spectacled, infinitely sensitive, suffering young music master, who at five was rapturous over a Mason and Hamlin piano, who developed heart

disease at fifteen and suffered from gastric disturbances, and who fainted when calling on a young lady with the intention of proposing. For in his unpretentious way, Williamson opened the door to the world of music which by 1920 Rosenfeld had made his own. Cadets may contrive strategems in order to go home, but certainly not, as Rosenfeld did, to escape to New York for a concert. His debt to Williamson is recorded in the dedication of his first book, *Musical Portraits* (1920).

Rosenfeld left few recollections, musical or otherwise, of his years at Yale. In his sophomore year he read George Moore and Arthur Symons, and Moore, he later acknowledged, influenced his feeling (already partially developed by his reading in George Meredith, Morris, Pater, and the early Yeats) for a "high," sensuous style. He heard Horatio Parker, professor of music, play the organ in Woolsey Hall, but Parker's opera *Mona,* which Rosenfeld heard in 1912 and ever afterward defended as the best American opera, was never associated with his college years. He has nothing to say about his work on "The Lit." or about his initiation into journalism on a New Haven newspaper. Journalism, however, seems to have been the career he had in mind, for he entered the Columbia University School of Journalism in the fall of 1912, and following his graduation in 1913, began to report for the New York newspapers. Six months of journalism were apparently enough and probably brought about the "revelation" we are told occurred on 42nd Street, where Rosenfeld decided that, having his own income of five thousand dollars a year,[1] he could follow his own calling. The calling was still uncertain, but it led immediately to Europe; and there, in London, in May 1914, he discovered in Bechstein Hall what Randolph Bourne was also discovering in Europe—his own generation and its "modern desire" to reach beyond the material to more spiritual satisfactions.

The experience of music was Rosenfeld's passport to this new world. He heard his way into things, and music undoubtedly kept his sensibility fluid and responsive. Such courses as "Social Conditions" and "Elementary Economics" did not enable him to see the social manifestations that Bourne saw so well and reported so carefully. Concert halls filled his horizon, not the rallies of socialists and suffragettes, the lecture rooms of Oxford and the Sorbonne, or the new architecture and planned communities to be seen on the Continent.

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[1] Lewis Mumford believes his annual income was nearer ten thousand dollars.

He would grow in social awareness, but this awareness always sprang from his knowledge of the travail of artists whose heroic mission, he believed, was to explore and to shape contemporary experience. The signposts of his awareness of the experience of his generation are the concerts he heard; the Armory Show of 1913 did not jolt his eye in the way that the music of Stravinsky and Schönberg (which he later described in cubist terms) jolted his ear. He came to painting and literature by way of music, and his account of his own discovery of modernism in "Grand Transformation Scene— 1907-1915" is a story of concerts.

The first concert goes back to the Riverview days when he had slipped away to New York and heard the *Pathétique Symphony*. As in almost everything he wrote, such backward steps prepare for the leap into modernism; it dates an epoch, and Rosenfeld's truthfulness about his response, that "awareness passed into ecstasy," dates a sensibility that would learn increasingly to pass from ecstasy into awareness. The second concert in London shocked the young listener because, although he had already left Tchaikowsky behind, he still felt that music with the power to exalt and satisfy had ended with César Franck and that recitals of new music promised him nothing. Perhaps his account of his tastes benefited in the retelling by his mature criticism, for he had already worn out his enthusiasms for Wagner, Debussy, Mahler, and Loeffler. As for American music, it was idealistic, a "pale wash," represented by the "gentlemen of Boston," the Chadwicks and Converses. What one got in the concert hall was "Victor Herbert emerging from the wings with an invisible shillalah to conduct his Rhapsody of favorite Irish airs." Such music left him among the "flat buildings on upper Broadway" with their electric signs and automobile displays feeling that he was in a world "without bloom, without mystery; dusty, smart and empty." Even the music of the Europeans, of Strauss, Reger, and Mahler, disclosed "the banality of a world posthumous to the wet, singing one"; and until that night in Bechstein Hall, with the cheap seats crowded with intent young people ("It was my generation—and alert, and out in life as gardens were"), with Scriabin, hitherto unknown to Rosenfeld, at the piano, there had been no one to tell him that "not lyric impulse but the rhetoric of romanticism, the passion for passions—and New York, were dead."

The nineteen-year-old boy in the black velvet jacket and slippers who played his "atonal ectoplasmic compositions" one winter after-

noon in 1915 in the playhouse on 57th Street completed the transformation. After this concert by Leo Ornstein ("It was all new, this music. . . ."), there was for Rosenfeld a "singular bloom on 57th St. . . . So strong, so promissory, New York had never lain." This music registered what Rosenfeld had believed to be lost: "The direct sounds of souls in contact with present existence: infinitely delicate and serious representations of the complex and nervous patterns of experience rising out of the relationship between the organism and the modern environment; encouragements to the accurate expression of every living sensation, perception, emotion." One imagines Stieglitz's photograph of the single slender tree rising from the wet city pavement when Rosenfeld expresses his sudden sense of "the perennial fecundity and youthfulness of life" and his realization that the new world he had discovered in this music would be "less dream-laden, more realistic with material than the romantic had been" and more "democratically affirmative of the natural variety of attitudes and impulses."

The years from 1914 to 1916 when the new music seemed to Rosenfeld to be saying, "YOUR TURN, AMERICA!" were devoted to literary apprenticeship. He worked at a novel, and though he never succeeded as a novelist, he remained a *writer* who approached critical writing, as few have done, as a creative art.[2] In retrospect and in the dedication of *Port of New York* he gave the credit for his awakening to Leo Ornstein, but his critical work and the program it served must be credited to the mediation of the ebullient Waldo Frank. Frank had been sent to Yale rather than to Heidelberg because his father wanted him to be an "American"; he had taken his degree, even an M.A., had gone into journalism and shortly afterward had packed his bag for Paris. There he found that he was not "needed"; he returned home where he "belonged," led an itinerant existence in what he later called "the American jungle," and began his career as novelist and critic, fully aware that in matters of expression "the present generation of Americans [were] more profoundly pioneers . . . more original adventurers than Columbus." Rosenfeld probably met Frank at one of Claire Raphael's musical evenings when Frank was a member of an amateur string quartet; and it was through Frank that he came to know Alfred Stieglitz, Van Wyck Brooks, and Randolph Bourne,

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[2] It is characteristic of his generation of men of letters that his style more often than his judgments was criticized. Criticism was a personal art, and though Rosenfeld valued impersonality he never relinquished the testimony of his personal contact with the object.

each in his way a center of artistic or creative enterprise, and all devoted to the cultural possibilities of American life.

Frank was one of the initiators of *The Seven Arts,* a short-lived but seminal little magazine which rallied the adherents of contemporary art with its declaration of policy, "AN EXPRESSION OF ARTISTS FOR THE COMMUNITY." Its editorial proclamation expressed the common faith of a group of critics who, unlike the lost generation that shared the '20's with them, never quite forsook the generous hopes for America that had stirred them in their youth. "It is our faith . . . that we are living in the first days of a renascent period," the proclamation began, "a time which means for America the coming of that national self-consciousness which is the beginning of greatness. In all such epochs the arts cease to be private matters; they become not only the expression of the national life but a means to its enhancement." *The Seven Arts* was to be the channel for the flow of these new tendencies, especially of the conviction that the aesthetic is inextricably a part of the social; and the very existence of the magazine was to create a community of artists—a school such as Henry Adams wished to found. Even though it died within a year, the spirit that animated it and the artists it had united found outlet in magazines like *The Dial, The Freeman,* and *The New Republic;* in *The American Caravan,* an annual volume of new writing; and in *Twice A Year,* a book-length magazine devoted to the arts and to civil liberties which began in 1938 and offered a place to those still living and memorials to those, like Bourne, Stieglitz, and Rosenfeld, who had died.

Rosenfeld began to write on music and literature for *The New Republic* in 1916, but it was Frank, the associate editor of *The Seven Arts,* who brought him into the community of artists whom Rosenfeld was soon to champion. He made it possible for Rosenfeld to appear in the first number, that of November 1916, with articles on the American composer and on "291." "291 Fifth Avenue" was the first gallery and workroom of Alfred Stieglitz, who might fairly be said to have provided the example and tended the soil from which such literary ventures as *The Seven Arts* grew. For years he had single-handedly fought for both European and American modern art. In 1903, he had founded *Camera Work,* a sumptuous quarterly, indeed a folio-sized gallery, in which he presented the history of photographic art, the work of contemporary photographers such as Paul Strand and Edward Steichen, and reproductions of the drawings, paintings, and sculpture of Rodin, Cézanne, Picasso, Picabia, Matisse, Brancusi,

Marin—artists whom he had already exhibited for the first time in America at "291." Patron, teacher, crusader, Stieglitz sponsored Alfred Maurer, John Marin, and Marsden Hartley in 1909, Arthur Dove in 1910, and Georgia O'Keeffe in 1916; later on when he opened The Intimate Gallery in 1925, he added Charles Demuth to the group of painters for whom he had established the gallery; and annually, first in The Intimate Gallery, then in An American Place, he showed their work.

As an art critic Rosenfeld was almost exclusively the interpreter of the painters in Stieglitz's group. He was fiercely loyal to Stieglitz, filially bound to him. He emulated him by becoming a discoverer, patron, and receptive critic of new talents; and the courage and faith with which he espoused the cause of art were comparable to Stieglitz's, drawn from the belief in the value of art that both profoundly shared: "the bridge to consciousness of self, to life, and through that, to new life and creation again." He took his aesthetics from Stieglitz, the work of Brooks, Frank, and especially Bourne providing the cultural framework for the findings of his sensibility. More than anyone else, he was the liaison between *The Seven Arts* and "291."

The war broke the momentum of the movement. Indirectly it led to the closing of "291," and it closed out *The Seven Arts* when its backer and some of its editors could not agree with Bourne that the intellectual must choose between "the war—or American promise." It took Rosenfeld to Camp Humphreys, Virginia, and it hastened the death of Bourne, who died in Rosenfeld's apartment in 1918. It chastened many a democratic faith; it brought in its wake those illiberal, reactionary undercurrents that Bourne had fought and that made a mockery of normalcy. For some, like Rosenfeld who remained loyal to Bourne's vision of America, it toughened the faith by revealing the strength of the opposition. If it seemed to be free and hospitable, the age of normalcy was nevertheless a cold war within America for those intellectuals who had taken to heart the lesson of Bourne's death. Critics thought of "Daisy," but did not marry her; and even the "Daisy" Edmund Wilson temporarily possessed was a *jeune fille* of his own sentimental boyhood.

Bourne, Brooks, and Frank were more influential in the early years of the movement than was Rosenfeld. Or perhaps one should say that they had a public stature that the self-effacing Rosenfeld never acquired. They were primarily culture-critics; he was a literary, art, and, above all, music critic interested in culture. They

did not know or master the arts as he did or leave behind so large and solid a body of criticism. Brooks was the acknowledged leader, having clarified the cultural scene in *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915) and in *Letters and Leadership* (1918). Bourne, as Rosenfeld said, was "the great bearer of moral authority while America was at war," a more political, forward-looking, and resolute "bannerman of values" than Brooks; had he lived, Bourne probably would have been the sovereign intellectual spokesman of his generation and Brooks and Frank would not have fought, as they did, a subtle battle for leadership. Not only was Frank recognized as a significant experimental novelist; *Our America,* a study of American culture compounded of Brooks' leading ideas and his own mysticism, was acclaimed in 1919, and his collected critical essays, *Salvos* (1924), and his *New Yorker* portraits of famous contemporaries gathered together in *Time-Exposures* (1926) made him a prominent critical figure in the '20's. His militancy and the avant-garde nature of his fiction were probably more acceptable to the younger writers (an issue of *S4N* and a book were devoted to him) than Brooks' querulousness and indifference to contemporary art. Bourne had been doubtful of the way in which Brooks intended to treat Twain, and none of Brooks' friends, having deferred judgment during his years on *The Freeman,* felt that he had redeemed himself with *The Pilgrimage of Henry James* (1925). That book, as Brooks himself admitted, broke his career and his mental health.

The '20's brought Rosenfeld forward. In that decade, he published a novel and seven volumes of criticism. *Musical Portraits, Musical Chronicle, Modern Tendencies in Music,* and *An Hour With American Music* were concerned entirely with music. *Men Seen* treated modern European and American literature, *By Way of Art* the arts at large, and *Port of New York* those Americans who in spirit or in fact were related to "291" or *The Seven Arts* and whose work dispelled the Brooksian gloom about creative America. These books, his private solicitude for innumerable artists, and the editorial labor of gathering and publishing the work of new writers in *The American Caravan* (which he began with Lewis Mumford and Alfred Kreymborg in 1927), represent the largest single effort on behalf of contemporary art of any American critic. Edmund Wilson, always a shrewd observer of his colleagues in criticism, recalls that Rosenfeld "at that time enjoyed a prestige of the same kind as Mencken's and Brooks', though it was not so widely felt as the former's." Not so widely felt, but

deeply felt: if *Paul Rosenfeld: Voyager in the Arts,* the testimonial volume which followed his death, is any indication, then, with the possible exception of Stieglitz, Rosenfeld was the most warmly regarded critic of his generation.

Not only his work but his personality, with which the work is so alive, explains this gratitude. Gentleness perhaps describes his total quality, a genial (in the Emersonian sense) responsiveness which permitted him, without grasping, to reach out to people in the same large way that he reached out to art-objects and to the environment. Lewis Mumford speaks of his "lyrical wisdom," that profound wisdom of experience emotionally mastered. This wisdom took him to the creative springs of art and taught him that " 'good equals the communication of life' " and that " 'the personality with a living object [never] goes into itself.' " Sin, he believed, was the withholding of love; the most intense emotion was tenderness.

By temperament Rosenfeld was a romantic. His values, however, must be placed between the evils of romantic yearning for the past and Flaubert's horror at man's everlasting filth and ferocity. He is a romantic in his belief in the primacy of the heart; for, though he is classic in his desire to see the external world clearly, he knew that the intellect could not fully capture the rhythms of life. Neither a transcendentalist nor a naturalist, he was the kind of humanist who takes life for his scripture. In his own experience he had had the doubts of all things earthly and the intuitions of some things heavenly of which Melville had spoken, and from his own suffering and awareness of the reality of death he had won a tragic sense of life and liberated his joy in living.[3] "To live," he said, "is to touch others with the antithesis at the heart of the world, with sorrow as well as joy."

His response to art and life was therefore something more than aesthetic. He judged both art and life by the possibility of "life completely used, exercised to the fulness of its capacity for tragedy and for delight, and deprived by death of nothing of worth." Though he appreciated the pioneer aesthetic achievements of Joyce and Eliot, he rejected the *"comédie intellectuelle"* of the one and the "fantasy of The Waste Land" of the other; and it was not that he overlooked the actual waste lands, but rather that he believed them to be relative conditions. Even now—he found in the case of D. H. Lawrence—"someone is always finding his age propitious to his form of artistry[,]

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[3] See "The Hospital," *Men Seen.*

the world and someone's idea are always managing to harmonize." To Lawrence, Rosenfeld accorded the highest praise. For Lawrence had not succumbed to the "parasite" of mind; he had had "new, increased and more complex capacities for feeling," and had therefore beaten out the rhythm of his age and helped men live more truly. Rosenfeld's measure of art was individual and social health: "We cannot be sincere and not crave fullest living."

Such attitudes were not prescriptive, yet had a seriousness that artists at least responded to. They were embodied in his person and exuberantly expressed in his own rich art of living. What he wrote in admiration of Guillaume Apollinaire applied to him: "Possessed of a voracious appetite for many kinds of experience, a swift sensibility and an inextinguishable intellectual curiosity, he communicated his joys and games and sensations not less through the forms of ordinary existence than those of literature." The Apollinaire of "metro'd electric Paris" was everything that the cosmopolitan and cultivated Rosenfeld wished to be in New York—a "vivid and distinguished person," a "cavalier of life." No auto-intoxicated D'Annunzio searching for some grandiose situation, posture, or movement to fill his emotional emptiness or using art to compensate for "inward incapacity," Apollinaire "had the gift of procuring for himself aristocratic pleasures among the ordinary house-walls and in the ordinary paths of urban life."[4] He was one of those people, as Henry James might have said, on whom nothing is lost. He nourished his art with every motion of the boulevards, with convivial talk, and with the pleasures of good food which he often prepared himself—as did Rosenfeld. And beneath his bonhomie was a strongly developed communal feeling and a combativeness in behalf of ideas that made him the champion of the cubists much in the same way that similar traits made Rosenfeld the champion of the artists of his time. The portrait that Rosenfeld drew can stand for his own, for its surest lines are those that delineate his "sensuous alertness," that show his awareness of being "deliberately used by those interested in the advancement of their own affairs," and that his willingness to serve the general cause had cost him his own complete self-expression.

Everyone acknowledged Rosenfeld's cultivation, and no one more than Sherwood Anderson. Anderson, whom *The Seven Arts* and *The*

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[4] Edmund Wilson noted Rosenfeld's "capacity for presenting even the most abortive incidents in the life of human intelligence as events in a significant, exciting and highly picturesque adventure."

Dial had lifted to fame, had come to believe, as he said in a letter, that he was the product of the "same thing Brooks talks so much about in his *Mark Twain*." Having been raised in a "different atmosphere than most of you fellows," he felt that he never really deserved the praise of a "truly fine aristocrat" like Rosenfeld who had done him the honor of leading him through Europe. Alyse Gregory, managing editor of *The Dial,* noted Rosenfeld's fine manners and remarked that he "followed the Latin rather than the Anglo-Saxon tradition and made of human intercourse an art." And Edmund Wilson, perhaps with a tinge of envy, said that more than any other American writer Rosenfeld had "the real freedom of the Continent," the gift of living "in touch with the great artistic life of the world." In the curious way in which his father's generation had marked the Jew (Justice Holmes, for example, called Harold Laski "the Jew"), Wilson attributed Rosenfeld's gift to the concurrence within him of American, European, and Jewish backgrounds. But whatever the reasons, and Wilson's have their share of truth, Rosenfeld did absorb European culture in an unself-conscious way and more wholly than did early apostles of culture like Lowell and Norton and later apostles like Eliot and Pound. This may account in part for the fact that he did not feel the need to adopt in criticism the magisterial tone. It accounts, certainly, for the reverence with which Wilson treated Rosenfeld in his brilliant imaginary dialogue between the older critic, who represented the living and human values of tradition, and Matthew Josephson, expatriate editor of *Secession,* who represented the explosive cultural nihilism of the younger generation.

Looking back over his career in the '40's, Rosenfeld observed that the present state of culture in America at best "possesses a memory with a span of possibly ten years." It is a telling observation about the large work and small expectation of the intellectual in our society—a society still Jeffersonian in its belief in the sovereignty of the present generation—and it was true enough in Rosenfeld's case. Rosenfeld lost his place, but not, as Edmund Wilson wanted to believe, as early as 1925 when, perhaps with the possibilities of his own *Axel's Castle* in view, he wrote that Rosenfeld had broken down our provincial prejudices and inhibitions against artistic expression and had permanently bridged the gulf between Europe and America and that therefore the need for his services was over. Rather, he lost his place, as Wilson recognized when Rosenfeld was dead and possibly from his own later

experience, because the climate of each succeeding decade was different. Rosenfeld knew that it was "an era of sudden developments"; generations were "littered every four or five years...." And therefore Rosenfeld knew that work such as his was never done. Goethe expressed his acceptance of the thankless and unremitting job of criticism: "We acquire little thanks from people when we try to elevate their inner necessities, to give them a great conception of themselves, to bring to consciousness in them the magnificence of a true, gracious way of being. I say this not to humiliate my friends. I merely say that thus they are, and that we ought not to be astonished that everything remains as it does."

Many things but mainly the discontinuity of the cultural conditions of the '30's and '40's brought about Rosenfeld's decline. The public indifference and the burning-out—so Wilson generalized on the depressing story of the American intellectual—seemed to go together, and many of Rosenfeld's friends noted his loss of confidence. But the only book he published after the '20's, *Discoveries of a Music Critic,* was his ripest work. It should have made clear to those who had doubted (was the dedication to Wilson ironic?) the depth of his awareness of social, historical, and intellectual forces and his skill in relating them to art. He had already rejected, in the case of D'Annunzio, an art subservient to preconceptions and political formulas, and once more took his stand in "The Authors and Politics." He had no mercy for the exhorter in art, not even for a friend like James Oppenheim, poet and editor of *The Seven Arts;* and where the artist was an "advertiser" like Gershwin or a propagandist like Shostakovitch, he had abdicated for Rosenfeld the essential individual integrity of aesthetic vision. In an essay on "The Nazi and *Die Meistersinger,*" he defined the uses and abuses of nationalistic art and reaffirmed his belief that "art is one of the great potential agents among a democratic people." But these views did not endear him to the majority of artists and editors who in the '30's had moved politically to either the left or the right and had accepted the security of doctrine.

Other changes, such as T. S. Eliot's ascendancy in elite critical circles and the commercialization of what had been an independent press, reduced the outlets for his highly personal, emotionally evocative prose. Even *The New Yorker* refused to print the articles it had asked him to write and Knopf turned down his proposed book on *The Seven Arts* group. And these rejections were doubly severe because the crash of '29 had destroyed his financial security and forced

him to play the game of supply and demand for which he was not equipped.

Personal difficulties—the crucial years after forty which he said were "devilish"—compounded the difficulties of survival. Fully aware that irresolution gets down to the "nucleus of sex," he tried unsuccessfully to resolve in an autobiographical novel, *Concert in Rome,* what he could not resolve in life. But this failure was not due, as some suspected because of his political stand, to his unwillingness to forsake bourgeois comforts, though it may have been due to his unwillingness, in reduced circumstances, to ask another to forsake them. He refused not so much to embrace life as to offer his life without all of its former resources. Diabetes, the war, the book on literary genres that he began after rigorously re-educating himself—all these things taxed the limited strength with which he maintained his quiet cheerfulness and dignity. Judged, however, by his desire to live boldly and dangerously "in the fashion of the artist" and by the critical necessity of remaining at the "battle-line," he was not the kind of failure he believed Brooks to be. Often lowered to menial and perfunctory reviewing, he was still able to speak out for the courageous publishing of *New Directions* and for new talents like Henry Miller.

The photograph of Rosenfeld taken in these years by Stieglitz catches the limpid sorrowful eyes and the full heavy inclined head; the severity, if ever it were that, of the college photograph is gone. No conqueror of an age, only its sensitive recorder whose "activity of spirit [was] an infallible sign of health," Rosenfeld died in circumstances of "indecent unceremoniousness" (a phrase from *Port of New York,* written two decades before) that only make more ghastly the terrible anonymity of American life. Stieglitz died on July 13, 1946; eight days later, having already sent a memorial article on his beloved mentor to *The Commonweal,* Rosenfeld had a fatal heart attack while attending the neighborhood Loew's Sheridan theatre at Seventh Avenue and Twelfth Street. The cold and careless obituary in the New York *Herald Tribune* reported that the movies were *The Green Years* and *Night Editor.* Toward the end, it mentioned that Edmund Wilson had said of Rosenfeld that "he gave himself away to the artists of his period." Essentially that was just what Rosenfeld had written of the lonely Stieglitz.

ADRIEN STOUTENBURG:

Ghost

Dream is a darkness troubled by sisters,
mothers, a friend, the wraith of a fish
with a hook in both eyes, a pet dog dying
and resurrected like a Christ in fur,
and black umbrellas that refuse to open.

Last night I saw her, helped her to the table,
lied about pain, forced her to eat
out of my hunger. Tablespoons lay crooked
against the oilcloth, and my hand was an animal
trying to correct them.
"We'll put them straight tomorrow," I said,
but told another, "She'll be dead by then."
As she was, and is, with the spoons still crooked.

I believe in ghosts.
I lay awake, dreaming, looking at grass
in the living moonlight—and something chirred:
frog, cricket, bird. For a moment I thought
it was a voice that mattered.

JOHN LOGAN:

Lines against a Loved American Poet after Hearing an Irish One's Nickname

When Munson was in Paris Harold Crane
Sent him twenty bucks for one of Joyce's dirty
Books. What did *Ulysses* do for him
If he could only write while he was young?

I know he lived an adolescent hell,
Hurt by a candy merchant father
Who made his son wheel it in a cart.
A pimp who got a fortune from the itch
For sweets, which is like the itch for love
He didn't give. The dirty bum. The dirty
Father. What can you say? He was a dog.
He had his son's day. At night the boy
Would stand beside his sleeping mother's bed.
Puzzled. Didn't know what the hell. Who does?
Who does. Still it takes peculiar heart
Not to eat the fondant of the sea,
That winking merchant attractive to any body.
Easy admirers have lied. A man
Cannot be a poet if he died.
They hold in them the feeling of the living.
I learn little, but Hart learns less from "Germ's
Choice" crying in the wilderness.

FREDERIC WILL:

Hanging Leaf: Nov. 1

Undone
In time, the wrinkled leaf
Is tossed
Beneath the sun.

(The leaf
Is still, concentric round
Its poise—
So perilous, so brief.)

The leaf
Surrounded with its fall
Descends
Descends our grief.

RALPH J. MILLS, JR.:

Dylan Thomas: The Endless Monologue

L'expérience que la vie dément,
celle que le poète préfère.
—René Char

I

There is an impulse in poets of a certain temperament which leads them to descend to the more remote depths and crannies of their being, below the level where articulate speech is formed, in order to confront the particular shapes of experience that obsess them like a sickness. Every effort is directed towards the transference of what is nearly unspeakable in themselves into the language of poetic art. Driven by this need to exorcize and define the forces and relationships at work in the recesses of their nature, these poets search out a means of expressing the unique character of their explorations, of bringing together words to release the pressure of dark images upon consciousness. The language of poetry, as Elizabeth Sewell has said, leans two ways: either towards "nothingness"—a platonic realm where physical objects collapse into their ideal essences—or towards "everythingness" —an inclusive tongue capable of rendering the vast plurality of creation. Dylan Thomas steered in the direction of the latter during his career, until, at last, he relied more and more on a comprehensive linguistic technique which is its own support, independent of exterior situations. At the outset, speech was for him a mode of self-defense, an active response to the ways of a world he was unable to control. The verbalization of these internal reactions resulted in the assignment of value and feeling to the shocks of experience, and helped to delineate the poet as a person in the chaos of his surroundings. In this fundamental respect, Thomas's poetry never varied; it was the base on which he slowly built his writing from the late 1930's on. The poems themselves may be taken as parts of a life-long monologue, centered on the conditions of existence, which we overhear when it assumes the objective pattern of written words.

Order and value spring, to Thomas's way of thinking, from the disciplined gesture of composition that externalizes the configurations of a turbulent inner life and wins the poet a temporary relief of his burden. Recognition of this was offered by Thomas himself in a well-

known reply to a questionnaire published in *New Verse* the same year (1934) as his first book, *18 Poems*:

> . . . the stripping of the individual darkness, which must, inevitably, cast light on what has been hidden for too long, and by so doing, make clean the naked exposure. Benefiting by the sight of the light, and the knowledge of the hidden nakedness, poetry must drag further into the clean nakedness of light more even of the hidden causes than Freud could realise.

The mixture of clinical, psychoanalytic, and quasi-poetic terms places this statement in a confused way between psychology and surrealism, while Thomas's practice belongs to neither and is singularly his own. What remains important is the compulsion to invade the inward reaches of the self and submit them to the strictures of poetic form. This region is often pre- or post-linguistic, and articulation is defied at the same time it is demanded. Yet once the source is tapped, a flood of images issues forth so universal that the apparently private character of the verse suddenly displays a vein of experience applicable to all men. This, together with the sonorities of the diction, explains the appeal of Thomas's writings to those ignorant of subtle meanings.

The question of Thomas's relation to surrealism lies here. Matters of influence cannot be resolved with any certainty at this time, if ever; there is, though, I gather, little evidence that he knew much of anything about the French surrealist movement. The resemblance between Thomas and writers like Breton, Desnos, and Eluard consists in the main of their mutual reliance on images brought up from the submerged portions of the mind. How these images were used by the individual poets is quite another matter. While the French poets sought to break all the barriers of conscious control in an attempt to harmonize the antinomies of life and achieve a *mystique* of the irrational, Thomas carefully worked his images into tightly constructed poems. He made this point explicit in a letter to Henry Treece on his methods of composition:

> I make one image—though "make" is not the word; I let, perhaps, an image be "made" emotionally in me and then apply to it what *intellectual and critical forces* I possess—let it breed another, let that image contradict the first, make, of the third image bred out of the other two together, a fourth contradictory image, and let them all, within *my imposed formal limits,* conflict.
>
> (Italics mine.)

If Thomas can be compared to the Continental surrealists in any way, it is only at those points where the latter abandoned the dictates of their manifestoes in favor of a more closely knit verse.

The one trait he did share with the surrealists Thomas held in common with other romantic writers, such as Blake or Rimbaud: the overwhelming desire to enter the unknown areas behind appearances; to reveal the remote laws of existence, the underlying connections between man and the forces of the universe. Elder Olson has remarked Thomas's ability to achieve access to the hidden corners of the creation, of the human psyche, and to the organic energies inherent in nature. The language of the early poetry dazzles the reader with a rhetorical power that animates each object, every scene or image. And the rush of images, the poet's seeming incapacity to contain himself, gives the impression that one is witnessing the furious disorder beneath the surface of the mind. That is Thomas's intention. However, we know, in another sense, that nothing could be further from the truth, for the poet's worksheets and his correspondence with Vernon Watkins prove beyond any doubt his painstaking and meticulous craftsmanship. In this, he is close to a poet like Paul Valéry: both writers were exacting revisionists. The letter to Henry Treece simply emphasizes Thomas's tremendous endeavors to fix the illusion in his poetry of the freely shifting underworld of the mind. These efforts are bound up with his youthful preoccupations, which do not wholly change with age but are modified and subdued to suit the growth of a new attitude.

What early seized Thomas was the operation of time—time as the instigator of flux, destruction, and rebirth. Critics such as William Arrowsmith and David Aivaz, who have emphasized the poet's obsession with *process,* are correct, but they have not always seen how this notion is allied with the very structure of the verse in *18 Poems* and *Twenty-five Poems.* As it is for Yeats or Edwin Muir, time is for Thomas a continual drain on human effort and strength, and the measuring rod of decay. But time remains only one of a group of ominous interdependent principles that hold life in a confining grip. Death, age, sexual drives, the continually changing face of man and the world—these collaborate with time or manifest its effects on a physical level. Together they compose the scheme of process. Yet process must be conceived through a fundamental division in being itself: a split between spirit and nature which creates an elaborate network of tensions in man's relation to his material body and the concrete world about him. This opposition serves Thomas as a dramatic groundwork for his poetry and helps him to arrange the flickering, nervous imagery of his first books.

The idea of an independent, self-contained nature, endowed with its own laws and energies, to which man is subject through his flesh, places the spirit at odds with it. Theological solutions fail to ease Thomas's distress. As he sees it, no salvation is possible at the hands of God; Christ, in the poems "Before I knocked," "Today, this insect," and the "Altarwise by owl-light" sonnet sequence, appears to be a victim of the same dilemma as other humans, despite his exemplary character: life is, by definition, foredoomed. Any victory over this condition depends upon what man can do for himself:

> And what's the rub? Death's feather on the nerve?
> Your mouth, my love, the thistle in the kiss?
> My Jack of Christ born thorny on the tree?
> The words of death are dryer than his stiff,
> My wordy wounds are printed with your hair.
> I would be tickled by the rub that is:
> Man be my metaphor.
>
> ("If I were tickled by the rub of love")

> I dreamed my genesis in sweat of death, fallen
> Twice in the feeding sea, grown
> Stale of Adam's brine until, vision
> Of new man strength, I seek the sun.
>
> ("I dreamed my genesis")

If the consequence of being born is a submission to the unleashed flood of time, racing to the brink of destruction, as Thomas makes plain in so many of his poems, it is not difficult to understand how he arrived at the techniques of innovation in his early verse. Poetry must mirror the flow of interior experience; it takes form at the meeting place of the spirit and the rapidly shifting elements of physical reality—that is, in the deep caverns of the psyche. In this manner, it will reflect the chaotic process by which man is ruled and, simultaneously, overcome that process for the moment through the imposition of the imagination's stability and order. The idea of poetic structure Thomas outlined in the same letter to Henry Treece elucidates this:

> My object is, as you say, conventionally "to get things straight." Out of the inevitable conflict of images—inevitable, because of the creative, recreative, destructive and contradictory nature of the motivating centre, the womb of war—I try to make that momentary peace which is a poem. I do not want a poem of mine to be, nor can it be, a circular piece of experience placed nearly outside the living stream of time from which it came; *a poem of mine is, or should be, a watertight section of the stream that is flowing all ways, all warring images within it should be reconciled for that small stop of time.*
>
> (Italics mine.)

This passage begins where the one previously quoted leaves off; it is of the utmost importance, for it sketches the aesthetic behind Thomas's first volumes. Again, his final poetry will come to contradict almost perfectly the italicized clause above. The pattern we have already seen as descriptive of the poet's plan of composition is expanded here to specify the total organization of the poem—with the added consideration of time. Thomas is insisting that his work should exhibit the friction between spirit and nature present in existence itself. Nature is represented in the generation, conflict, abolition, and regeneration of images and meanings, while the poetic structure as a whole is conceived as a gap in time: the mind's static figuration of temporal flux. The poet's imagination, then, raises these images from the successive motion of events to the stillness of art.

The raw material of the poems issues from the "motivating centre" or "womb of war," that part of the poet's make-up which is, somehow, rooted in the organic operations of the universe. In a poem from his notebooks, printed in *Poetry* (November, 1955), Thomas sees human life determined from within by the unalterable governance of time:

> The almanac of time hangs in the brain;
> The seasons numbered by the inward sun,
> The winter years, move in the pit of man;
> His graph is measured as the page of pain
> Shifted to the redwombed pen.

Much of the seeming obscurity of the poetry stems from the desire to render the effects of the temporal in compressed, often elliptical, cinematic sequences. The relation to film technique seems to me a real one. We know (from Thomas's autobiographical stories, from John Malcolm Brinnin's book, and from references in a number of poems) that he took interest and delight in the movies; and his ability to write for that medium is demonstrated by *The Doctor and the Devils*. There is no reason why we should not think, as Parker Tyler has said, Thomas's verbal devices were developed at least partially through an insight into the parallels between film sequence and the action of the mind as it records experience. This is assuredly one of the meanings implied by the poem "Our eunuch dreams." If we push the analogy a little further, we find the internal arrangement of the poems quite similar to the continuous pressure of time which the movies exhibit mechanically, as well as to the juxtaposition of conflicting images that comes close to emulating methods of filming. For apt comparison, we need not go beyond Thomas's own shooting-script.

But the poem as a formal, "watertight" structure objectifies time or process by removing, then ordering its images. While individual human experience passes on to vanish in oblivion, leaving only imperfect traces in memory, the poem does not; chance alone can cause its loss. The imagination in back of these poems, whatever mutations it undergoes, is, beneath everything, constant and speaks for man the spirit's rage and love amidst chaotic circumstance: "the insect fable is the certain promise."

II

The course of human life that finds expression in Thomas's monologistic poems is one overshadowed by death. Every variation in his subject, approach and technical devices carries with it a corresponding variation in the poet's sense of death. Whichever way we turn in his poetry, this recognition is never lacking. From the claustrophobic atmosphere of the opening poems to the hymnic pastoral verses of his last years, death lurks just the other side of appearances, eating away the heart of life.

Even before his writing received public notice, Thomas was immersed in a youthful fatalism—though not at all posed—that compelled him to observe incipient ruin spread through the whole universe. With his view colored by this perception, he plunged headlong in his poetry to reveal it in the organic movements of nature and human life. The work of his mature years shows less agitation, an attitude of greater calm, even of acceptance of death. Yet at the time he was creating the rich comedy of *Under Milk Wood,* we can rather safely assume—after Brinnin's harrowing account—Thomas was himself engaged in a terrifying pursuit of the inevitable. At any rate, this tragedy aside, most of the pieces in *18 Poems* are concerned with relating man to his end, often by blunt statement:

> All issue armoured of the grave,
> The redhaired cancer still alive,
> The cataracted eyes that filmed their cloth . . .
> ("When once the twilight locks no longer")

Existence in its physiological aspects is circular, its conclusion present at its origin. Thomas's insight into this situation is far from new, but his means of illustrating it with an intensity sprung from inner need casts a sudden light on old and familiar knowledge.

Birth is an event tinged with horror because it places a new creature squarely in the corrupting and fatal stream of time. This agonized

outlook is compounded when the penalties of life—the prospect of decay and destruction—are foreknown in the womb, as they are in "Before I knocked" or "If my head hurt a hair's foot." But sexual relations are unavoidable, indeed, compulsive, and once indulged they are irrevocable: life will issue forth. Since birth is deadly, the instant of conception, achieved through the peak of sexual pleasure in one of the closest and most profound of earthly relationships, has an ironic finality about it. The act of procreation molds a victim to be hurled out to his death:

> A process in the weather of the world
> Turns ghost to ghost; each mothered child
> Sits in their double shade.
> ("A process in the weather of the heart")

In these considerations, love does not redeem or add another dimension to sexual longings and their fulfillment. Thomas's notion of physical existence and his deep-seated puritanism lead him to identify such unions with the impersonal forces propelling nature in an endless cycle. Consequently, the opportunity for life also contains the threat of determination and finitude. In the array of shadowy figures that populate Thomas's poetic world at this stage, we are reminded of a universal plight. Their anonymity derives from the fact that the poet has broken the boundaries of personality and descended into fluid nether regions, where dreams and images disclose an hereditary bondage to nature. These lonely shades, locked in mortal combat with overwhelming powers, act as metaphorical counters in the changes Thomas plays upon his theme. Invested with emotion, they are refractions through consciousness of his own conflicts and uncertainties, yet this is precisely what lends them a dramatic quality. Such figures emerge unannounced from concealment to startle us with the realization that we, too, know inhabitants much the same.

Life continues, as a totality, unimpeded, pushed on by nearly mechanical sexual operations. At best, there are a few occasions in the early poems testifying to a growth of human feelings which try to elevate sexual activity to a plane above sheer sensation and enforced procreation. Thomas is aware, from "If I were tickled by the rub of love" (1934) to "Lament" (1951), that lust alone can be remarkably hollow but has an almost unshakable grip on man. This is usually recorded with graphic realism:

> The world is half the devil's and my own,
> Daft with the drug that's smoking in a girl

And curling round the bud that forks her eye.
An old man's shank one-marrowed with my bone,
And all the herrings smelling in the sea,
I sit and watch the worm beneath my nail
Wearing the quick away.

("If I were tickled by the rub of love")

Guilt arises from the unresolved quandary of a divided existence where the spirit cries out in vain and the uncontrollable energies of sex issue in a yawning void of decrepitude and death. But Thomas does, at times, attempt to bypass the tyrannies of biological determinism in a way that will avoid begging theological questions. This is treated from a particular angle in "All all and all the dry worlds lever," where an acceptance, an affirmation of the unity of creation, is voiced in exalted tones. Sexual affairs fall into place in a scheme which ultimately encompasses the natural world and the race of man. The theme is introduced with images drawn from various stages of the earth's development and the round of seasons. But nothing escapes the strict logic of life, death, and rebirth. Man, through his physical being, is strapped to the same turning wheel:

All all and all, the corpse's lover
Skinny as sin, the foaming marrow,
All of the flesh, the dry worlds lever.

Thomas urges us to shed our fright before the relentless chemistry of instinct at work in us beyond restraint: "Fear not the screws that turn the voice,/And the face to the driven lover." A mechanistic diction, used throughout the poem, stresses the rigid system that binds the universe and makes itself felt in human experience. "Lever," "lock," "seeded milling," "ribbing metal," "trigger and scythe," and "screws"—all add to the impression of a huge, primal machinery: an industry at the core of things sweeping beasts, plants, rivers and stones, and every person along its set path. The only hope for the individual is to live in some sort of harmony with his ill-fated destiny. Elementary impulses may then be imbued with creative purpose by the spirit, and life become a meaningful enterprise. These dark and fundamental drives within man can be made to yield, in the manner of the Freudian theory of Eros, rich, beneficial fruits. Thomas devotes the final stanza of the poem to an eloquent celebration of fertility. The "mortal circle" enclosing life and death is praised for an inherent fecundity that brings about perpetual renewal:

Flower, flower the people's fusion,
O light in zenith, the coupled bud,

> And the flame of the flesh's vision.
> Out of the sea, the drive of oil,
> Socket and grave, the brassy blood,
> Flower, flower, all all and all.

The sea functions as the matrix of earth's energies; and in much of Thomas's poetry symbolizes both the source of life or resurrection and the kingdom of the dead. Its boundless size and restless motion suggest the unpredictability of a ceaselessly shifting cosmos where individual creatures and things are swallowed up and replaced. If the poem concludes positively, on a note of joy, we suspect it is a momentary, somewhat contrived, emotion. As an effective way of coping with the prospect of a ruled life and certain annihilation, it leaves no satisfaction. But in the context of his writing at this time, Thomas is unable to contribute more than a frail note of affirmative feeling, which quickly drops away before the opposition of process. Just as the protagonist of "The Visitor," a story printed the year following *18 Poems,* is granted a nightmare vision of nature breaking down life into its original parts, then bringing forth new forms, only to die himself, so in this poem man cannot evade the limitations imposed on him but must gain dignity within them. "Everything ends," Thomas remarks in another poem, and to stave off despair we need first to confront this as a fact. Temporal process maintains its erosion, while survival, as the last stanza above implies, exists in the whole, not in the individuals comprising it.

As Jacob Korg has pointed out, the universe Thomas presents in his *18 Poems*—and this is largely true of the next volume—is a machine, established to run of itself with complete disregard for its inhabitants. Whether responsibility for this can be assigned to a personal God like that of the Judaic-Christian tradition is decidedly questionable, contrary to the wishes of many critics who would like to place Thomas well within the field of religious orthodoxy. Certainly, the final purpose of man in the determined order of the world avoids definition in the poems—unless it is a definition of man by man. God, if He exists and presides over the mechanism of His creation, chooses isolation and obscurity rather than a revelation of His intent.

Though Thomas's prevalent mood is one of skepticism, he does, on occasion, look to a transcendent cause for the peculiar arrangement of humanity and its environment. Nonetheless, there is a unity in his approach to these inscrutable sources. Accounts of the beginning of existence and matter or of the Fall tend merely to be supports for the

portrayal of death, chance, and the supremacy of nature in other poems. The poem, "In the beginning," which describes the genesis of the universe, borrows from the Gospel of St. John, but Thomas, like Wallace Stevens and other modern writers, uses scripture to enforce a personal interpretation without regard for doctrine. The "three-pointed star" and "the pale signature" are presumably names for deity but are vague and indecisive in comparison with a theologian's explanation of divine attributes. There is an indication that Christ is involved in the creation ("The blood that touched the cross-tree and the grail/Touched the first cloud and left a sign"), though Thomas fails to pursue it. Most likely, this points again to the poet's view of Christ's martyrdom as exemplary of each human death. A basic imperfection shares in the origin of the world ("Heaven and hell mixed as they spun"), and the universe receives its capacity for self-renewal, visible so frequently in Thomas's work. Subsequent to this, another poem, "Light breaks where no sun shines," ties the physiology of man to an external, material reality. Domination by time, by biological necessity, and an inherited alliance with the unswerving course of nature make the inner life of a person the reflection of process:

> Dawn breaks behind the eyes;
> From poles of skull and toe the windy blood
> Slides like a sea;
> Nor fenced, nor staked, the gushers of the sky
> Spout to the rod
> Divining in a smile the oil of tears.
>
> * * * *
>
> Light breaks on secret lots,
> On tips of thought where thoughts smell in the rain;
> When logics die,
> The secret of the soil grows through the eye,
> The blood jumps in the sun;
> Above the waste allotments the dawn halts.

The body is a microcosm; all its parts obey the same dictates, display the same behavior as the elements of the external world in which it is located. In a very real sense, the body *is* nature, for the two are inseparable. Only consciousness, spirit, the mind—call it what you will—hangs above the operations of matter, meditating on resurgence and decay.

Beyond the poem on the creation of the universe, there are several pieces in the early books which treat a primordial disaster that has left a mark on all mankind. "Incarnate devil" retells the tale of Eden, with

Eve's temptation placed on a sexual level, and hints at a Manichean dualism: godly and ungodly powers have about equal strength. The poem is so constructed that the "we" who undergo and bear witness to the events in the Garden are not just the original Adam and Eve but the young of every age who hear the story of the Fall, as Thomas must have done himself, and acquire their first knowledge of the loss of innocence:

> We in our Eden knew the secret guardian
> In sacred waters that no frost could harden,
> And in the mighty mornings of the earth;
> Hell in a horn of sulphur and the cloven myth,
> All heaven in a midnight of the sun,
> A serpent fiddled in the shaping time.

In the "Eden" of the womb ("sacred waters that no frost could harden") the results of the Fall are transmitted from generation to generation, but the story is learned in the days of childhood. The original title for this poem in its journal publication was "Poem for Sunday," which may suggest as its source the teachings of a children's Bible class or Sunday School. Likewise, the tale of Eden is referred to in "Today, this insect" as "this children's piece." Francis Scarfe, a pioneer essayist on Thomas's poetry, has remarked that the Bible strikes the poet as "a cruel and crazy legend." But this oversimplifies Thomas's attitude, for the book is also a document of hope, of man's undying aspiration towards a permanent order—or so it is used, especially in the later writing. The difference between this use of it and full acceptance of it as a revelation of divine truth has baffled some critics. The Fall, like other Biblical events, is dramatized by Thomas in his own experience or that of the thinly-disguised narrators he fashions, and it continues to influence him in pastoral poems, such as "Fern Hill" and "Poem in October."

In any case, we must not, if we are to be honest, confuse Thomas's appropriation of material or ideas from the Old and New Testaments with a solid religious position, for he has none. It is pretty plain to the careful reader that Thomas is a man of intense religious feelings, which are often striving against his intellectual disbelief. These emotions are for him spontaneous and natural; they leap out of the pain and terror of living under the conditions his poetry depicts:

> The lips of time leech to the fountain head;
> Love drips and gathers, but the fallen blood
> Shall calm her sores.
> And I am dumb to tell a weather's wind
> How time has ticked a heaven round the stars.

Paradise is created by the human imagination: a world in which survival is assured provides solace for the sufferings endured within time. But for Thomas as an artist his poems—whether celebrations or elegies—produce the spirit's testimony to the struggle against process. Poetic composition becomes a religious act. Thomas partially resembles Yeats in his consideration of these ultimate questions; however, he does not similarly adopt a series of masks or rigorous intellectual roles to approximate the multiplicity of answers. He presents the origin of the universe at the hands of a mysterious force; he recounts the legend of the Fall; he gathers images of a cosmos where man is caught and consigned to the life cycle of plants, animals, and the changes of mineral elements; he protests his ignorance of the final outcome of the situation in "Why east wind chills" or "Should lanterns shine"; in some instances, he moves toward prayer, for example, at the close of "Foster the light." Each poem stems from an openness, a vulnerability to the experience it conveys without benefit of any preconceived scheme of ideas, philosophical or theological. At the root of his early poetry lies Thomas's perception of the gap between mind and physical nature, but this is never formulated as such. A seminal intuition, it stays buried in his bones and lends itself to emotional and sensory responses. Thomas's thinking is empirical, inheres in the texture of the poetry, for the poems grow up close to the borders of the internal events that cause them.

III

As he proceeds in his writing, Thomas begins to modify, even abandon, methods and material upon which he relied heavily in *18 Poems* and *Twenty-five Poems*. His interest fastens on subjects more specific and varied. Here the occasion that gives rise to a poem plays an integral part in its construction. Betrayal by an acquaintance, the vicissitudes of love, the birth of his own child and the death of an unknown one in a London air raid—these and other moments in the poet's life take on an importance for his art. At first, some of the daring and sheer rhetorical animation seems to have gone out of the language, but so has much of the monotony and confusion. Furthermore, these new poems are steps in the direction of an expansive view, and a good number of them strike with an impact as great as any of the best previous verses, however different the means of achieving it. The difference consists of more than a substitution of concrete situations for obscure ones as the point of departure for a dramatic and lyric

speech. What happens is that Thomas casts aside the guise of impersonality, of the anonymous narrator and speaks openly. After the bewildering and unsuccessful allegory of the "Altarwise by owl-light" sonnets, Thomas starts to develop the potentialities of his own voice and image ruminating on events past or at hand. With this decided alteration in the manner of his art, there goes an increased proliferation of language, the dense accumulation of which, in "Over Sir John's hill," "In country sleep," and other poems, gains the consistency of an isolated abode held together by the interdependence of words.

The world Thomas calls up with frequency in his later poetry is Welsh both in detail and atmosphere. From memory and observation, he recreates it in legendary form, sometimes in the unclouded splendor of a child's eye. Fundamentally, his hatred of age and death remains constant, as the following passages—written nearly a decade apart—make clear:

> 'Time shall not murder you,' he said,
> 'Nor the green nought be hurt;
> Who could hack out your unsucked heart,
> O green and unborn and undead?'
> I saw time murder me.
>
> ("Then was my neophyte")

> Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,
> Time held me green and dying
> Though I sang in my chains like the sea.
>
> ("Fern Hill")

The attitudes are the same, though more calmly related in "Fern Hill." In fact, the horror Thomas exhibits in his youth gives way with maturity to an outlook of broader scope, as we might expect. Anger and frustration at the waste of life diminish and, in their place, we hear the exalted tones of "And death shall have no dominion," "Ceremony After a Fire Raid," and "A Refusal to Mourn." There is a certain acceptance of the limiting terms of earthly existence which yet does not completely approve them. Defiance of this tragic lot is assimilated by the act of writing, so that the value and durability of the created poetic world, especially in the pastoral and birthday poems, are set against the physical universe in which the poet will perish. The concluding line of "Fern Hill," quoted above, emphasizes the contrast, for the poet's speech transcends his imprisonment in time. Thomas no longer adheres to the aesthetics of composition he discussed in his letter to Treece; the poem is now, in a valid sense, "a circular piece of

experience placed nearly outside the living stream of time from which it came." This direct contradiction of his primary aims derives from the personal stance he takes, and the way his preoccupations, as a result, fit in with it.

The three birthday poems, "Twenty-four years," "Poem in October," and "Poem on his Birthday," convincingly illustrate the progressive movement of Thomas's art toward its lofty closing period. Nothing reveals his decision to talk as himself, to designate the feelings expressed by the speaker in a poem as his own, so definitely as these meditations on anniversaries of his birth. Such self-exposure likewise appears in those poems which are specifically concerned with others. We know, for instance, that it is Thomas—and no one else—who delivers a silent and personal elegy for Ann Jones in "After the funeral." His admission of a discernible poetic personality corresponds exactly with a shift of attention away from the crevices of the womb and psyche. He bends his labors to the fabrication of a private universe—private, not in the sense of Flaubert's dream of a book about nothing, a literature of pure style, but in the sense of *Les Illuminations* and Wordsworth's "Intimations" ode: a radiant universe of sun, earth and sea, of time suspended, yet touched with the salt of pathos. Thomas's gaze focuses on more than the arrivals and departures of man; it falls on the stretch of life between them. With this expansion of interest that covers his Welsh experience as a youth and an adult, Thomas sharpens his sensibilities to cope with an emotional range of greater complexity and freedom. Two powerful strains in the poet's character, the innocent child and the magician of words, come forward and contribute to the invention of this poetic universe. Thomas becomes a maker of spells: the creatures and settings he knows so well are "interiorized," gathered inside his imagination and endowed with the uniqueness and wonder of an individual myth, until they are the property of the poems alone. These visionary qualities, evident in his writing from the beginning, find fulfillment in a rich and unrestricted flow of language, which, like Rimbaud's, obliterates the known reality of objects and situations represented by the words and replaces it with a new reality, the insular dimension of the poem. A profuse diction clusters the images and actions of the poems into an interrelated pattern that is its own foundation, its own end; like the stylization of fable and ritual, the elaborate structure of these works realizes its fullest meaning from within, not in reference to an external model.

This activity of the imagination provides a counterpoint to the poet's actual predicament, Thomas growing more sensitive about his own death in the midst of a world dying around him. The war most likely brought home to him, in a way his youthful perceptions of mortality could not, its dark, hovering presence. At any rate, Thomas could not easily shrug off the matter, and, as his pessimism gains ground, a desperate optimism and nostalgia for boyhood takes hold in his art. In the first of the birthday poems, "Twenty-four years," he has not yet come to this outlook but is still in the stages preparatory to it. However, the subject has ceased to be the center of emotional reaction in an anonymous speaker of Thomas's contrivance; instead, it is the poet himself, enlarging upon the consequences of a specific occasion. The hazy, tumultuous scenes, riddled by ghostly voices, which the early poems disclose, vanish in the tightly packed, sunlit landscapes of a pastoral realm evoked in solitary speech.

"Twenty-four years," with its attention to death and the naive dandy who undertakes a venture that will end in oblivion, cuts a path for the clash of opposites in many important poems written afterwards. These poems turn on the dilemma of a wish to recall the transitory pleasures and ignorance of childhood, with its idyllic Welsh background, and the recognition of a future crumbling like soil in the palm of the hand:

> Oh, let me midlife mourn by the shrined
> And druid herons' vows
> The voyage to ruin I must run,
> Dawn ships clouted aground . . .
>
> ("Poem on his birthday")

Both views of life unite in "The Conversation of Prayer," where the child's simple plea for a safe sleep is contrasted, and later interchanged with, the father's fear of the loss of his love. The prayers themselves are assertions of hope, verbal formations thrust in the face of uncertainty. Like poems, they originate in the desire to maintain love and order, a human dwelling-place against insuperable odds. "Vision and Prayer," despite its more orthodox surface, manifests similar characteristics. The purity of the Christ child, born in the same "bloody birth room unknown/To the burn and turn of time" as all men, is symbolic of human origins in general. In addition, the sufferings of Christ, "the high noon/Of his wound," link him with Adam after the Fall, just as his innocence and light suggest the return of Eden: "O spiral of ascension/From the vultured urn/Of the morning/

Of man . . ." Thomas's submission to the sun image of Christ at the conclusion of the poem can hardly be accepted as a profession of doctrinal faith; actual belief does not stand at the base of this piece. The poem surges up on a crest of feeling for a person of legendary stature who has heroically endured the most excruciating agonies out of love. Pain and guilt on the author's part lend momentum to it. The goal of the poem, seen in the final lines, is Thomas's extinction of his present self in union with another. As "the sun roars at the prayer's end," the poet is consumed by the image of his own creation. This wish to get past oneself and one's surroundings, even at a terrible price, belongs to the tradition of modern poetry from Baudelaire to our day and compels Thomas to make anew the climate of his youth. The return to childhood or the magical recasting of Wales acts as a release from the steady decline of the poet's life with its certain finish. As "The Ballad of the Long-legged Bait" and "A Winter's Tale" amply demonstrate, a vicarious death and transmutation of personality occurs as a purposeful element in composition for the writer so that he dies momentarily within himself to be reborn in the timeless world of his art. The poet is a voyager who must divest himself of everything in order to discover it again; he is the man enamored of a beauty that demands his very life in payment for attaining it. Once in the regions his poetry has realized, Thomas can, as he does in "Poem in October," wander forever the green, clear country lost with boyhood. Surely, the same impulse in a slightly different form dictates the stories of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog*. Those who see in Thomas a parallel to Keats could do worse than compare the attitudes of these last poems with those of "Ode to a Nightingale" or "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

The earlier poetry, we have indicated, tends often to employ a cinematic technique—in keeping with Thomas's aim to record the fluctuations wrought by time on the human system. Each poem of this kind begins, so to speak, *in medias res* and carries on to a make-shift resolution. That is, in most cases, the groups of images, uniting and dispersing and reuniting, partake of the incessant rotation of nature at work in man's physical being, and thus have no conclusion but one which is arbitrarily given. These "stills snapped by night in the bread-sided field" fit in nicely with Thomas's aesthetic as he wrote it to Henry Treece. But the poetry that follows carefully sets up protective borders, refuses to be mixed with the ebb and flow of temporal tides; areas of experience are closely defined. Rather than take this as a complete turnabout, we should understand it as a logical consequence

of Thomas's emergence as the real subject of his art. Relying on recollection and imagination, the poem surpasses its initial definition as a static gap in the midst of process; quite literally now, it is conceived as a weapon against process, a rival creation impervious to time. In the war between spirit and nature, then, the mind wins its own sort of triumph. The life of an individual continues to run, helter-skelter, toward its destination—perhaps God, perhaps the void. Thomas pitches a mind-made order in contradiction. The final stanza of "Ceremony After a Fire Raid," with its theme of an imagined resurrection elevating the seared earth to the level of spirit, deathless and inviolable, provides a good example of his practice:

> Into the organpipes and steeples
> Of the luminous cathedrals,
> Into the weathercocks' molten mouths
> Rippling in twelve-winded circles,
> Into the dead clock burning the hour
> Over the urn of sabbaths
> Over the whirling ditch of daybreak
> Over the sun's hovel and the slum of fire
> And the golden pavements laid in requiems,
> Into the bread in a wheatfield of flames,
> Into the wine burning like brandy,
> The masses of the sea
> The masses of the sea under
> The masses of the infant-bearing sea
> Erupt, fountain, and enter to utter forever
> Glory glory glory
> The sundering ultimate kingdom of genesis' thunder.

Implicit in the action of this and numerous other late poems is a transmutation through which, we said previously, Thomas enters, in the gesture of composition, the universe of the poem, a universe that, in turn, soars free of its moorings. On occasion, transmutation appears in the religious forms of prayer and resurrection; often, it effects a return to the scenes of childhood or adopts the role of allegory and legend. The scope of language is magnified, encloses a world of chosen things and invests them with depth and richness. When the poet's image of himself comes into sight, it is sunk in this recreated world and cannot be removed:

> And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white
> With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all
> Shining, it was Adam and maiden,
> The sky gathered again
> And the sun grew round that very day.
>
> ("Fern Hill")

The poem makes its own eternity; collecting and joining fragments of personal history with those of myth, it fuses them into one perpetually thriving piece, a ring of images forever sealed.

At the start of the "Author's Prologue" to the *Collected Poems,* we discover Thomas, perched high above the Bay of Carmarthen and the narrow strip of waters leading to the Irish Sea, musing on his art. The "Prologue" is a poem of praise in time's despite, for Thomas metamorphoses himself into a latter-day Noah who builds his ark against the danger of the coming flood. Of course, the ark is the sturdy boat of Biblical origin, but since the poem is moving on two levels at once, we recognize also an oblique reference to the Ark of the Covenant. Both meanings reflect the characteristics of poetry, which is the indestructible product of imagination or spirit, and the sacred vessel that houses man's most intimate statements about himself and his existence. To thwart the flood, Thomas musters from the love, anger, and fright within him the words for an ark of poetic speech:

> Look:
> I build my bellowing ark
> To the best of my love
> As the flood begins,
> Out of the fountainhead
> Of fear, rage red, manalive,
> Molten and mountainous to stream
> Over the wound asleep
> Sheep white hollow farms
> To Wales in my arms.

More than any other poem, this "Prologue" furnishes for us the notion of his work Thomas entertained near the finish of his life. The monologue falls back upon itself: words are loved for their own sake, and for the images they preserve of what is passing or gone. And so it is not unusual to find in certain of these last poems that we have got close to the writer's bench. By which I mean we are drawn into Thomas's self-conscious concern over the purpose of his labors. He tears and breaks open the seams of the poetry; through them we glimpse the author at his task. In isolation, Thomas raises around himself the walls of a world *he* has made: "the poem of the act of the mind," to interpose a line of Wallace Stevens' which seems most appropriate here.

Yet, in all of this, there is a pungent realism. Though the poems structurally form a closed and timeless order in which Thomas remains as a spiritual residue, he never forgets the debt he must pay as a mortal creature. And so death intrudes on the pastoral landscapes, boyish

pleasures; it crowds the thought of the mature man. In "Over Sir John's hill," which combines animal allegory ("I young Aesop fabling to the near night . . .") with an elegy for human kind, the preying hawk destroys by instinct, and without malice, "the small birds of the bay." Thomas's use of the birds allows him to portray objectively the impersonal quirks of fortune attending an individual death. He still reads, as he did in his youth, the sentence of perishability inscribed on nature and the physical organism:

> There
> Where the elegiac fisherbird stabs and paddles
> In the pebbly dab-filled
> Shallow and sedge, and 'dilly dilly,' calls the loft hawk,
> 'Come and be killed,'
> I open the leaves of the water at a passage
> Of psalms and shadows among the pincered sandcrabs prancing
> And read, in a shell,
> Death clear as a buoy's bell. . . .

But here the subtle distinction must be made between the poet's attitude toward his actual death and his continued survival in the territory of his art. We are abruptly returned to the spirit-nature dichotomy: the former is the possession of poetry; the latter takes his life. Thomas sounds the note of self-immolation throughout his latest verse, while he strives, in the same moment, to complete a world over which his imaginative vision will always prevail. The two lines of effort are indeed paradoxical, but not incompatible. In this sense, the conclusion of "Over Sir John's hill" constitutes a defeat of death because the helpless birds who have met their end between the claws of the hawk are still granted immortality through the images and rhythms hewn out in their memory and embodying them:

> The heron, ankling the scaly
> Lowlands of the waves,
> Makes all the music; and I who hear the tune of the slow,
> Wear-willow river, grave
> Before the lunge of night, the notes on this time-shaken
> Stone for the sake of the souls of the slain birds sailing.

In spite of this Darwinian-style massacre, Thomas is able, midway through the poem, to praise the "hawk on fire in hawk-eyed dusk," and to bless and grieve for the "Young / Green chickens of the bay and bushes." Every man, bird, or fish suffers beneath the decree of sacrifice established as a universal principle; and the hawk shall no more escape it than his victims. As he drifts toward his own demise, Thomas com-

memorates on the face of a stone their brief passage. In the determined plan of nature and the cosmos, only his words retain independence.

IV

Whatever difficulties attend the separation of truth from the unholy web of gossip—obscene tales of degradation and incontinence, and so on—surrounding Thomas's last few years—particularly those spent in American tours—there is little doubt, I think, of his underlying weariness and resignation. His productivity slackened, though the final work shows a high degree of polish: evidence of his careful composition. Yet, as Theodore Roethke says in a memoir, he rode on harder to his death with a reckless beauty. It would seem as if the creation of a magical poetic world, a Wales of the mind, left him satisfied. For Thomas needed grief, horror, and pain to prick and goad him into writing: the anguish of birth and death; the ironies of love; the indignities heaped upon man. He was never at peace with these legacies, but they came less and less to shriek in his ear, to obscure his sight. The biting irritations of existence gradually resolved themselves in the enchantment of language, in the habitation of an alternate reality. Words, he must finally have believed, were alone capable of reviving and making permanent what the "process in the weather of the world" ground to dust.

Kenneth Rexroth's remark that Thomas developed a lyric art with a maximum of sheer music and a minimum of meaning as the way of denying a reality he could not tolerate impresses me with its shrewdness, though it is a bit incomplete. Themes are repetitive, especially in the first books of verse, but they are handled from various angles and build up by intention a picture of human circumstance which cannot be reduced to something like a birth trauma. However, Rexroth is right when he points to Thomas's work as a distinct universe of discourse. While this universe gained in substance, the actual world withered away, and the poet's desire to live went with it. From the confused mixture of times and places, happenings and objects, Thomas selects those to be harbored in the circumference of art. At last, the mind rests in company with its cherished figures. Similarly, the location of *Under Milk Wood* is not so much a Welsh town as it is a region of inner space; the conversation that lifts itself from the silence of the night to carry Llaregyb through its daily orbit consists of the echoes of a single voice. While ruin would scar a real town, it cannot touch

this fabled one. When all fades nostalgically away in darkness with the final curtain, we know that villagers and village, even their ghosts and dreams, will reappear at the next dawn. They circle on the wheel of process, but without alteration.

In a third birthday poem, published a few years prior to his last, fateful journey to America, Thomas devotes himself to meditations on the doom he feels just ahead. The setting is identical with that of the "Author's Prologue" and "Over Sir John's hill"; and the three poems, taken together, are emanations of a single situation and theme. Though Thomas, as we have said, is vitally involved in the whole trio of poems, it is this present piece which brings attention to *his* death and the vision he can muster to offset its crushing weight. The "Prologue" elaborates the design and motive of his art, while "Over Sir John's hill" is a tribute to all living creatures, contrary to their proscribed destiny; but here the poet is committed to a personal faith: a vindication of his life through poetry.

The poem starts once again with Thomas seated on the cliffs, where he is able to survey the activities of river, bay, and sea. And what he watches is a scene of beauty and magnificence, haunted by the brute promise of death. This threatening force lurks at the edges, under the surface of a ripe and teeming existence, and waits to grasp heron, curlew, otter, and the observer. As before, his knowledge transposes every action into terms of a struggle that dissolves in futility:

> Under and round him go
> Flounders, gulls, on their cold, dying trails,
> Doing what they are told,
> Curlews aloud in the congered waves
> Work at their ways to death,
> And the rhymer in the long-tongued room,
> Who tolls his birthday bell,
> Toils toward the ambush of his wounds;
> Herons, steeple-stemmed, bless.

Remembrance of his birthday is the simple notation by the mind of the body's degeneration; seeing it in himself, he grows acutely conscious of the same disease in others. To account for this latent mortality, Thomas reverts to the story of the Fall, though by implication rather than overt statement. For the reality he witnesses in its fullness must drop away, disintegrate. Thomas himself, strung out on the rack of time that pulls him apart between past and future, clutches at the shards of memory; and from these, and from his anguish, he culls an image

of hope which his language makes actual. Belief is not in question here; the case is one of a response by feeling and imagination to the unrelieved potency of fact:

> In a cavernous, swung
> Wave's silence, wept white angelus knells.
> Thirty-five bells sing struck
> On skull and scar where his loves lie wrecked,
> Steered by the falling stars.
> And to-morrow weeps in a blind cage
> Terror will rage apart
> Before chains break to a hammer flame
> And love unbolts the dark
>
> And freely he goes lost
> In the unknown, famous light of great
> And fabulous, dear God.

God and heaven are more closely conceived than heretofore, but the awareness that they belong to the mind and have no guaranteed status beyond this never flags: "Heaven that never was/Nor will be ever is always true." While primal innocence and joy have departed, to return but in dreams and reveries of youth, so the paradise fondly imagined by the adult Thomas is a necessary corrective to life's ephemerality and incompleteness. It is a terrestrial paradise, the other side of the Wales he has known and loved, which takes on life, more than life, and rests secure within his poetry. Nothing shall be lost; each creature lingers in a familiar land, or graces the soil with its presence. The "marrow of eagles, the roots of whales/And wishbones of wild geese" are not dispersed; instead, they, and the human spirits dwelling among them, form part of a larger community of the living and dead, accompanied by "blessed, unborn God and His Ghost." God, then, is perhaps the luminous aura which originates in these concordant relationships. In the resurrection that follows, He is linked to the earth and also assimilates it as "the light of old/And air shaped Heaven where souls grow wild/As horses in the foam." He is, I think, totally associated with images of an idealized pastoral world; Thomas cannot, nor does he wish to, separate God from this mythical kingdom. The notion of a deity is attached to the poem and fills the chasm between the poet's acceptance of his end and the rejection of it implicit in the creation of literature.

The line of religious speculation wavers and vanishes in the three

concluding stanzas. Thomas recalls his human resources, enumerates his equipment as a man without losing sight of the tests to which it is put:

> Four elements and five
> Senses, and man a spirit in love
> Tangling through this spun slime
> To his nimbus bell cool kingdom come
> And the lost, moonshine domes,
> And the sea that hides his secret selves
> Deep in its black base bones. . . .

Roughly speaking, we detect the hemispheres of both the early and later poetry converging in these verses. But here the buried regions which bind man to nature are overcome by that affirming "spirit" with its capacity for love, reflection, and creativity. This assurance enhances Thomas's impression of what he sees, until everything is blended in one massive orchestration that casts out fear and doubt through the appropriation of things to itself.

And Thomas's monologue goes on. With the disappearance of the poet, his work is left to speak ceaselessly in absolute independence. The writer, in those strange ways we cannot truly fathom, often awaits death anxiously: he knows, at least, that the terrifying demands of his art will halt. His entire existence, all his strength are dedicated to the creation of something to replace him. When this is accomplished, there is no more; he can merely repeat himself. He lives for the exploitation of his gifts, and for the moment when he merges his identity with the use to which he has put them. At that instant of his death, he flees into the depths of his poems—indivisible from their language and imagery. What biographer can call him forth without, simultaneously, calling forth his art? So it is with Dylan Thomas. We seem to see him yet, in his little one-room shack overlooking the waters. While below the birds settle down with darkness and the tide reverses, his voice, strong and deliberate, ascends the quiet night air. The monologue of his poetry begins and ends, and then begins another time.

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